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MAID OF FLORENCE.

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J. FISHER, 71 COURT STREET, BOSTON.



THE
MAID OF FLORENCE.



The Maid of Florence.

ACT V—SCENE III. 3

Bianca. Come thou blest potion. [*Producing a phial.*
Within thy narrow compass is embraced
A score of deaths, bought with a single pang.
Pour forth thy furies on one little life,
And I will thank thee !

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THE
MAID OF FLORENCE;

OR,

A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE!

A PSEUDO-HISTORICAL TRAGEDY,

In Five Acts.

WITH ENTRANCES AND EXITS, AND DESCRIPTION OF THE
COSTUME.

EMBELLISHED WITH A FINE WOOD ENGRAVING.

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COSTUME.

COLONNA.—*First Dress*—A plain steel armour : breast plate—steel cuisses, and ditto leggins—a red cloak—steel helmet and black plumes—sword—armed cap-a-pie. *Second Dress*—(*Act III.*) A ducal shirt, trimmed with gold—white silk leggins—velvet shoes, gold clasps—a ducal coronet on head. (*Act V.*) Splendid armour.

BERNARDO.—*First Dress*—A steel armour, &c. *Second Dress* A splendid Venetian shirt, hat, feathers. *Third Dress*—(*Act V.*)—Armour, helmet, &c.

SAVOLA.—A rich Venetian shirt, or tunic—hat and white feathers—grey wig.

ANTONIO.—Similar costume.

BONDELMONT.—A splendid gold armour : breast plate—cuisses—leg pieces—polished helmet, white plumes—sword—scarlet velvet robe trimmed with gold Grecian border—the whole en suite. *Second Dress*—A rich Venetian tunic, or shirt—silk leggins, and shoes with buckles to match—hat and feathers. (*Act V.*) Change to rich armour.

DECASTRO.—(*Similar to that of Bondelmont—the changes the same.*)

DONATE.—(*Ditto.*)

MONTANO.—A rich Venetian tunic, silk leggins, russet boots, or velvet shoes—Venetian hat and feathers—blue scarf and sword. (*Act V. Changes to armour, with all the appropriate appointments.*)

STROZZI.—

STENO.—

LANDINO.—

SORINI.—

(The same as Montano. The colours may be varied. The changes the same.)

PAGE (of Colonna.)—A silver shirt—leggins—Old English shoes, hat, &c.

FOLLOWER (of Bondelmont.)—A rich half armour—sword—hat, and plume.

PRIORS (of the Arts)—Red senators' robes, trimmed with ermine—white capes.

NOBLES.—In rich Venetian shirts.

CITIZENS—In plain tunics—flesh leggins—shoes.

SOLDIERS—In plain armours—russet boots—helmets and spears.

BLANCA.—While dress—red velvet lappets, trimmed with gold spangles—rich head dress—splendid drapery—gold bracelets, neck-lace to match. (Her first dress should be plain—but, there would be no time to change, in the same act.) (*Act V.*)—Black dress with veil or mantle to cover her bust with.

THERESA.—A plain white dress, with lappets and cestus.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

BIANCA, *Daughter to SAVOLA.*

THERESA, *waiting woman to BIANCA.*

COLONNA, *a Roman Noble, General of the Florentines, and Captain of a free Company.*

BERNARDO, *Kinsman and Lieutenant to COLONNA.*

SAVOLA, *a great Florentine Merchant, and Gonfalonier of Justice, (Chief of the Signiory.)*

ANTONIO, *brother to SAVOLA.*

BONDELMONT, *a young Noble of great power and influence.*

DECASTRO, *Friend to BONDELMONT.*

DONATI, *Kinsman to BONDELMONT.*

MONTANO,	}	<i>Florentine Nobles.</i>
STROZZI,		
STENO,		
LANDINO,		
SORINI,		

A PAGE *of COLONNA.*

A FOLLOWER *of BONDELMONT.*

PRIORS OF THE ARTS, (*Florentine Senators*), NOBLES, SOLDIERS, CITIZENS, &c.

SCENE—Florence.

PERIOD—Close of 13th Century.

THE MAID OF FLORENCE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Florence.*—*Apartment in Savola's Palace.*

BIANCA and THERESA seated, occupied with embroidery.

Bianca. Come, let me see your progress—

[*THERESA rises and approaches.*

'Tis, indeed,

Just as I feared, and must be all undone.

'Tis thus the careless hand its labour doubles.

Theresa. Indeed, my lady—

Bianca. Say no more, sit down.

You are an idle girl, whose eye and mind

Will ever stray from their appointed task,

To seek amusement elsewhere.

Enter SAVOLA.

Savola. What, my Bianca, ever thus employed
A pattern of domestic industry?

[*BIANCA rises.*

Were you the daughter of a needy burgher,

This were a virtue; here, 'tis needless toil.

Bianca. 'Tis useful e'en to me. We feeble women,
Unfit for better things, with busy trifles

Must drive away the meddling fiend, who waits

On unemployed hours. Our evil thoughts—

Savola. Your evil thoughts, my child? You know not
evil,

Except a little self-will. But why now,

While every maid in Florence, young and old,

The fair and homely, noble and the mean—

A

Adorns herself, and eagerly awaits
The eye of admiration, why should you
Her fairest daughter, noble, young and rich,
Thus hidden, disappoint the longing eyes
That watch for you alone ?

Bianca.

But why to-day?

This is no festival. What other cause
May call them forth ?

Savola.

It is a day of triumph.

Our gallant army, by Colonna led,
That youthful veteran, with conquest crowned
Is entering now the gates ; and every heart,
That beats with love for Florence, now prepares
To grace the triumph of the sons of Florence !

Bianca. The sons of Florence ! What have they
achieved ?

Say, who has been the hero of the war ?
No son of Florence, but a foreign chief ;
The bold Colonna, with a hireling sword,
Achieves the laurels of each stricken field ;
His mercenary band our strong defence,
His glory the reproach of Florentines.

Savola. You are unjust ; although Colonna be
The first in arms, yet have our native youth
Played well their parts, and should partake his triumph.

Bianca. They merely did their duty. To have failed
Had been dishonour.

Savola. And it is then no merit to have done
What many fail to do ? At this glad hour
Each maid and matron's bosom, who can boast
A lover, son, or husband, in their ranks,
Dilates with triumph. Be not you alone
Unmoved amid the universal joy.
Bianca's image is the guiding star
To many a gallant heart. Still have you frowned
Where I would have you smile. Relax, my child,
Your frozen pride, and heed your father's prayer.
Before your eyes will pass the proud array,
In which the banners of your noblest suitors
Shine forth conspicuous. Upon them look,

Mark well the glances of devotion's eye,
Choose you the worthiest, and on him bestow
Some little mark of favour, e'en a smile,
Enough to fan the flame of hopeless love.

Bianca. It may not be. So bold a preference
Would be unmaidenly.

Savola. I say no more.

I, overfond, entreat, but should command—
Farewell, perverse one, I must now begone.
The signiory expect me.

[*Exit.*

[*BIANCA resumes her occupation. A trumpet. THERESA runs to the window.*]

Theresa. They come, they come! In gorgeous array
The flashing armour, and the prancing steeds,
The nodding plumes, and banners waving high,
In gay confusion, speak the pomp of war.
Oh lady, now look forth.

Bianca. You need not tempt me.
The vice of Eve is not so strong within me,
But it may be controlled.

Theresa. A sight so glorious you ne'er beheld.

Bianca. Forbear your hopeless task, you cannot move me.

Theresa. Now they draw near, and plainly may you
mark

The banner of each noble house in Florence,
Its sons and their retainers clustered round.
Full many a noble banner freely waves,
And many a gallant youth, in battle tried,
Upon your window turns an ardent eye,
And asks one smile from Florence' fairest maid.

Bianca. What have they done to win a smile from me?
No flaunting banner, gorgeous coat of arms,
The trappings and the foppery of war,
Delight my fancy, or can win my love.

Theresa. Are you a woman? See where Strozzi rides,
His war horse champng proudly on the bit,
While he, unconscious of the gazing crowd,
Looks but for you; and shall he look in vain?
A single smile he asks, a cheap reward.

Bianca. Let him pass on; I have no smile for him.

Theresa. See, gay Bondelmont comes, beloved by all,
Excepting one; the noblest youth in Florence,
And blest in all, excepting in his love.
Must he, too, pass unseen? She sure is stone—
A banner follows now to me unknown—
It bears a massive column. 'Tis Colonna's;
Colonna, who, with mercenary sword,
So well has served the righteous cause of Florence.
His revenue, his ruthless followers' blood;
War his delight, the tented field his home.
Perhaps the eye that scorns our native youth
As summer soldiers, yet may look on him
With an approving glance.

Bianca. Why should it not?

He is a warrior, in council wise,
And daring in the field. The head, the heart,
And hand are his to plan, and dare, and do
Heroic deeds. Though he were ugly, old,
Obscure in origin, in manners mean,
Yet would I hold him an accomplished knight,
A princess' love deserving.

Theresa. Look then, my lady, on this hireling soldier.

Bianca. Spite of your sneers I will— [goes to window.

A hireling soldier!

He looks a hero worthy to lead forth
A kingdom's power, to battle for a crown!

Theresa. Looks he not like the champion of a queen?
How gracefully he reins his gallant steed,
Who spurns the earth as of his burden proud?

Bianca. This is no carpet knight. No gaudy trappings
Set off his simple armour; clothed in steel,
The saddle of the war horse is his home.
Inured to triumph, with collected mien,
The shouts of gratulation he receives
As an accustomed thing.

Theresa. Sure she is caught;

The bird that oft has 'scaped the fowler's net,
May yet be caught at last. He sees her now

He marks with eager glance her lovely form,
 Doffs his plumed helmet, in graceful homage, saying,
 'I, who defy the world, will be your slave!' [*Aside.*
 Nay, lady, not back, look forth again.

Bianca. I cannot.

Theresa. He lingers yet as loath to look his last
 Upon a glorious vision. He is gone,
 By the rude throng of his retainers hidden.
 Yet still his lofty plume his course betrays—

[*BIANCA looks out eagerly.*

Nay, now, my lady, you need gaze no more—
 Why lady, can it be? [*BIANCA retiring from the window.*
 Oh, shame to Florence!

That she should find the rock of her defence,
 Not in the valour of her native sons,
 But in a foreign chief's heroic deeds.

Theresa. Why, what new fit is this? [*Aside.*

Bianca. A foreigner! Why should I deem him one?
 What is our boasted Florence but a part,
 A little spot in fruitful Italy?

His native tongue is mine; the gentle air,
 That even now sweeps o'er the walls of Florence,
 Has lately fanned the stately towers of Rome.

Theresa. Ha! Runs the current thus? [*Aside.*

Bianca. He is my countryman!—and were he not,
 The brave should find in every clime a home,
 And noble hearts to noble hearts be joined
 By stronger ties than consanguinity—
 But whither am I led? He knows me not;
 One moment seen and in the next forgotten.
 I will not think of him. [*Sits and resumes her occupation.*

Theresa. What a convincing orator is love!
 For all her vaunts, had he been ugly, old,
 Obscure in origin, in manners mean,
 Though Cæsar's equal, he had yet remained
 A foreigner to her.

[*Aside,*

Bianca. (*throwing aside her work.*) It may not be.
 The petty arts of female industry
 May task my hands, but cannot fix my mind.

[*Exit, followed by THERESA.*

SCENE II.—*Hall of the Signiory.—The Signiory in session.—Present SAVOLA, presiding, ANTONIO and the Priors of the Arts.*

Enter DONATI, DECASTRO, BONDELMONT, and other Nobles.

Savola. Welcome, young lords, most welcome back to Florence.

You now have given your martial ardour vent
Upon our foes, your valour's proper food.
And you, Bondelmont, have you crossed unharmed
The sanguinary plain?

Bon. I have, my lord.

Savola. If fame speak true, not so have your opponents.
Well have you gilt, young lord, your maiden sword
With foreign gore, and not the blood of Florence.

Alas! that you, among our noble youth,
Should stand alone in this. Think not, my friends,

[*To the other nobles.*

That I now seek occasion to reproach you;
But well you know how oft our native blood,
Poured forth by native hands, delights the eyes
Of foes to Florence.

Donati. We must own it true.

Savola. Where is your general, the brave Colonna?

Bon. He now approaches.

Enter COLONNA and BERNARDO.

Colonna. Reverend signiors,
To all and each a most respectful greeting.

Savola. (*descending from his seat.*) Let me embrace you.

Colonna. Signior Savola,
You do me too much honour.

Savola. That cannot be. Welcome, good lieutenant.

[*To BERNARDO.*

I need not say, Colonna, you are welcome.
You bring your welcome with you. Victory,
Which, till you took the guidance of our arms,
Had been of late somewhat a stranger to us,
Now perches on our banner—small the price,
Yet rich the purchase you have now achieved,
The safety of the state.

Colonna. If I led well, I have been nobly followed.
Point glory's path to Florence' gallant sons,
And they to death will tread it.

Savola. Your letters we have read, yet fain would hear,
From your own lips, the tale of your success.

Colonna. It would but ill beseem me to become
The trumpet of my fortune.

Antonio. Yet for once,
Be the narrator of your own great deeds,
And gratify us all.

Colonna. 'Tis known to all,
Our foes, inflamed with confidence and rage,
Had sat them down before Alcino's towers,
And closely pressed the siege. Already they,
Inflated with success, account it theirs
In fond anticipation. Its defenders,
By famine wasted, weakened by the sword,
Now watch with hollow eyes the road to Florence,
And feed themselves on hope. E'en that weak food
Was failing fast, when, o'er the mountain's brow,
E'en with the blessed sun, up rose our banners ;
A sudden, secret, and circuitous march
Had placed us there, and the unready foe
Beheld the glittering, but fearful storm
Just bursting on their heads. To arms they rush,
But all too late; ere they in meet array,
Can form their battle, we upon them sweep
In firm, unbroken and impetuous charge.
Nor long they stood the shock; they centre broke,
And driven backward towards the castle walls,
They strove in vain to rally—

'Twas then brave Lando
Wide open threw his stubborn castle gates,
Where late they knocked in vain, and forth he led
His faint but valiant few. This new assault
Dispersed their lingering hopes; the panick spreads;
Their reeling ranks in wild confusion lost,
Their very numbers aid in their destruction.
No longer glorious battle rules the plain;

Pursuit and slaughter, prisoners and spoil
Usurp its place, and on the tumult sweeps
In wild career, and still the wider spreads
O'er every path that offers hope of safety.

Savola. It was a glorious day, thus to defeat
With force so small, the trebled numbered foe.

Antonio. Pursue your tale, we long to hear the issue.

Colonna. Pursuing still the foe, we soon encamped
Beneath Sienna's walls. A refuge there
The routed army found. Her trembling sons
Shut fast the gates, nor dare to issue forth
And prove the fortune of a second field ;
But look in vain for succour. We the while
Fired their rich villas, and laid waste their fields,
But could not tempt them out. So we to Florence
Return, with spoil encumbered, to await
The issue of the proffered terms of peace.

Savola. We stand no less than they in need of peace ;
Our treasury is empty, and we know not
How it may be replenished.

1st Prior. Our trade
Now languishes beneath this wasteful war ;
And broken merchants, needy artisans,
In growing numbers, speak its dreadful ills.

Antonio. Our wasted or half cultivated fields
Can not supply us food ; the populace
Cry out for bread, and can scarce be restrained
From wild excess, the child of pinching want.

Savola. Too great, alas ! our need of peace, Colonna.
Think you our foes are earnest in their proffers,
Or do they only pause for lack of breath ?
Is this a truce, or will it prove a peace ?

Colonna. A hollow truce, and not a solid peace,
Or else I know them not. We must repose
As men who rest on a debated field,
With coming day a new assault expecting.

Savola. Then we will rest in arms.
Now speak I of yourself. The Signiory,
Who are the voice of Florence, cannot rate

Too high your great deserts. They have decreed
To the brave men who serve beneath your banner
Double their promised pay, and to yourself
Ten thousand florins and the fief of Pulci—

Colonna. A rich donation, well becoming Florence.

Savola. We still must hold you high in trust and honour;
For, brave Colonna, Florence owes you much,
And will not prove ungrateful.

Colonna. Nor will I
Prove ever else than faithful.

Savola. We no longer
Will keep you from repose, and on the morrow
We will repair unto the Sainted Dome,
There with glad voices and grateful hearts
To sing *Te Deum* for our victory.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*A Street before Savola's Palace.*

Enter COLONNA and BERNARDO.

Colonna. What think you of the Signiory's grant?
Have not these burghers proved most liberal?

[*COLONNA eyes the palace inquisitively.*]

Ber. I think, my lord, that they can well afford
A part to them, who have preserved the whole.

Colonna. What! not content! You bear a grasping
soul.

Ber. What is ambition but a grasping soul?

Colonna. True, but to grasp at golden wreaths of fame,
Not sordid pelf, becomes a generous mind.

Ber. They are but shadows, not substantial things;
The shades of wealth and power—

Colonna. (*eyeing the palace.*) Well, be it so.

Ber. Will you proceed? The night comes on apace.

Colonna. You are, I think, familiar with this city.
Whose is this stately mansion? Know you not?

Ber. It is Savola's, whom you lately saw
Presiding in the council.

Colonna. Say you so?

Ber. The family, though somewhat new to power,

Have been from sire to son, for generations,
The votaries of commerce, and are now
The wealthiest and most potent of their class,
Those merchant princes, new nobility,
Whom commerce has created.

Colonna. Who form his family? Has he no child?

Ber. An only child he has, a haughty maid,
Whose icy coldness and unyielding pride
Reject with scorn the vows of noblest suitors.
The young Bianca, called the flower of Florence,
A fair but self-willed girl—

Colonna. Forbear—no more.

You know her not, and may, perchance, belie her.

Ber. Ha! is it so?

I marked, my lord, as we rode slowly past,
You on that window gazed with steadfast eye,
And made a moment's pause. You doffed your helm,
And then you lingered, often looking back
As if to mark the spot— [*Shouts and songs at a distance.*]

Colonna. What means that noise?

Ber. It is the sound of boisterous revelry.
The youth of Florence, from the field returned,
Now celebrate their valour o'er their cups,
And boast their mighty deeds. They are unused
To fortune's smiles on the embattled plain,
And may be pardoned some excess of joy. [*Shouts.*]

Colonna. They shout again.

Ber. Their orgies will not end
Without some wild and riotous excess.

Colonna. Why think you so?

Ber. Because I know them well. These walls contain
A factious people, given to commotion,
And loving riot as their daily bread.
Each noble cherishes some deadly hate,
Some late or else hereditary feud,
Which he would gladly wreak—
Not the Colonna and Orsini bear,
Each to the rival house, more lasting hate,
Than these unto each other. Add to this,

That the divisions 'tween the haughty nobles
And discontented commons, though skinned o'er
By seeming union, are yet unhealed,
And, on occasion, will again break out.
Trust me, wide Italy holds not a state
More cursed with feuds and factions.

Colonna. In state so wild, the bold unresting spirit
Is in its element, and may put forth
All its untiring energies, nor pause
And sink to loathsome rest for want of work.

Ber. Most true, my lord; in this distracted state
A daring mind, by policy directed,
May find foundation and materials
To rear the fabrick of despotic power.

Colonna. (Musing.) Florence shall be my home. For I,
in Florence

Will find the food wherewith to feed ambition
E'en to satiety, until it grow
Perchance to kingly power.—
Now to my lodgings. Some three hours hence
You may expect me.

Ber. Trust me, my lord, the streets will not be safe,
When night has fallen. You must not remain
Alone abroad.

Colonna. Away! you are too fearful.
I have not borne the brunt of twenty fields,
To fall a victim to a drunken broil,
Or coward rabble's rage,—pass on, and leave me.

[*Exit* BERNARDO.]

Here will I pause until some herald, fit
For Cupid's embassies, some errand page
Or waiting gentlewoman issue hence.
More will I learn of this unrivalled maid,
Whose single glance of silent approbation
Has far outweighed with me the rabble's shout,
Or e'en the senate's solid gratitude.
'Twas from yon window shone her lovely form—

[BIANCO shews a wreath at the window.

By heaven 'tis so! I see a beauteous hand,
Whose dazzling whiteness far outvies the pearls,

Encircling the wrist ; and in that hand
 A leafy coronet, the warrior's meed,
 The victor crowning laurel ; and the wreath
 Of blushing roses skilfully intertwined,
 Tell that another and a sweeter hope
 May prompt the warrior's toils—

[*BIANCA lets fall the wreath.*

It falls ! 'Tis mine, and I will keep it safe,
 Although a thousand jealous lovers strive
 To tear it from my brow. The hand is gone—
 Come, thou sweet promise of the lover's bliss,
 Hide now thy head, while I, by thee imboldened,
 Seek entrance here to thank the beauteous giver ! [*Exit.*

SCENE IV.—*Bianca's Apartment.*

Enter BIANCA.

Bianca. Alas ! what have I done ? Does this become
 Savola's daughter, and the proudest maid
 Within the walls of Florence ? Thus to seek,
 Unsought, the notice of a foreign knight !
 Alas ! what can he deem me but a bold,
 Unblushing girl, of modesty devoid,
 And therein destitute of every grace !
 Oh, rather would I be to him unknown
 Forever, than be known to be despised.
 I fear, I fear he cannot but condemn me.

Enter THERESA.

Theresa. Lady, I have a message for your ear,
 If you will deign to hear it.

Bianca. Say from whom ?

Theresa. The message that will show.

Bianca. Then for your message.

Theresa. 'Tis this : bestowed by fair Bianca's hand
 A laurel wreath adorns Colonna's brow.
 Can he be worthy to receive the gift
 Yet not to thank the giver ?

Bianca. Is it thus
 Colonna speaks ? Perchance he prizes that
 I feared he would despise.

Theresa. What say you, lady ?
 Will you not listen to Colonna's thanks,
 Which burden him unpaid ?
Bianca. What ! I receive him here ? Impossible !
 Girl, you are mad to think it,
Theresa. Is this your answer : you wish not to see him ?
Bianca. Nay, be not so abrupt. Tell him—
 [*Walks about in doubt.*

Theresa,—
 Do you not think it would be very wrong ?
Theresa. Not I, indeed ; methinks it were unkind—
Bianca. No, no, it cannot be, I must not see him.
 [*Musing.*
Theresa. I think you ought, and know I shall be thanked
 If now I disobey. [*Aside—exit.*

Bianca. (*musiug.*) It may not be.
 Bianca, rouse your pride, enough of folly
 Already marks the day. *Theresa*, no !—
 What, is she gone ? Perchance to lead him hither !
Theresa, stay, forbear, make fast the door ;
 I will not see— [*Goes to the door.*

Enter COLONNA and THERESA.

Colonna. You will not see Colonna.
 And yet presumptuous Colonna comes,
 And this the armour that has made him bold.
 [*Shows the wreath.*

Bianca. 'Tis I have been too bold—yet sought no more
 Than to express what every Florentine
 To great Colonna owes.
 In honest truth I thought thou wouldst not heed,
 Amid the murmur of applauding crowds,
 A simple maiden's praise.

Colonna. The maiden's praise
 Sounds ever sweetest to the warrior's ear.
 Its gentle tones outstrip the clamorous breath
 Of shouting crowds, and pierce the thrilling heart.
 When fair Bianca from her window gazed
 Upon Colonna as he rode beneath,

A single smile he sought to crown his triumph.
But when this wreath his throbbing temples bound,
His swelling heart confessed his triumph perfect.

Bianca. A paltry favour—you imbolden me
To lay aside the maiden's bashfulness,
Nor blush to thank the saviour of my country;
Poor, empty thanks, but from a grateful heart.

Colonna. Thus would I be rewarded. Have I served
The cause of Florence with adventurous sword?
Her fairest daughter smiles upon my deeds,
And I am well repaid.

Bianca. Do you love Florence?

Colonna. Next to famous Rome,
Where first I saw the light, I ever held
Delightful Florence dear. I heard with grief
Her perilous condition, and rejoiced
To give her sinking cause my zealous aid.

Bianca. Why are you not a citizen of Florence?
Did she but number one among her sons,
As wise in counsel and as great in arms,
By him soon rescued from internal strife,
She might defy external enemies.

Colonna. You view my actions with a partial eye,
And paint them brighter than their native hues.
Is there no Florentine, who in the field
Can guide his country's arms? Or is it not
The jealous eye of faction that o'erlooks
Your bravest and your best?

Bianca. Such once she boasted; they are now no more.
To noble sires degenerate sons succeed,
To peaceful arts and sordid gain devoted.
Their dainty limbs disdain the rugged steel,
The soldier's vesture; and their torpid blood
Would freeze within their veins, upon a bed
Of mossy turf, the hardy warrior's couch.
Or are there some whose bosoms yet retain
One spark of martial fire? To rob the weak,
And wreak their vengeance on a private foe,
Comprise their valiant deeds.

Colonna. Yet some there are, who might escape your
censure.

Among the chosen body, who with me
Opposed their bosoms to the hostile spear,
And put to rout Sienna's warlike sons,
Were there no Florentines, who in the field
Played manly parts and did their country honour?

Bianca. I know them not—and Florence owes them
little.

Her banner, lately trampled in the dust
Beneath the feet of her insulting foes,
You have upreared, and shielded her from ruin.
I would you were my countryman, and bound
To Florence by the sacred ties of birth.
Ere long new scenes of action will invite
Your warlike spirit to new deeds of arms,
And she in evil hour will deplore
Colonna's aid afar.

Colonna. An exile now
From native Rome, by hated foemen ruled,
I will transplant my love and my allegiance
To Florence' kindly soil.

Bianca. Will you make
Your future home in Florence?

Colonna. Well I trust
To live and die for her.

Bianca. Then happy Florence!
You will possess a warrior fit to guard
Your sacred rights, and lead your arms to glory.

Colonna. On me the generous Signiory bestow
The city's Freedom and fief of Pulci.
I am become a citizen of Florence,
And burn with zeal for my adopted country.
Will you not own me for your countryman?

[Takes her hand.

Bianca. I will, most gladly. You are welcome hither—
That is, to Florence. Here you should not be,
And I have erred in thus receiving you.—

Colonna. Yet let me bless the error.

Bianca. If I am rude, forgive me.—You are here
But an intruder, and a longer stay
Will be a worse offence—my lord, farewell. [*Going.*]

Colonna. I will obey—Say we shall meet again.
O let me not have found a kindred spirit
Only to mourn its loss.

Bianca. Nay, we must leave
To coming time the tissue of events,
And trust to favouring fortune. [*Exit.*]

Colonna. I never, till this hour, knew the want
Which still harassed my soul.—I am alone :
The shout of praise falls faintly on my ear ;
The glow of triumph briefly thrills my heart ;
Ambition's hope in faded splendour shines ;
For I have none to share them. Could I win
This noble minded and enchanting maid
To be my honoured bride, I thus would halve
The cares of life and double every joy.

Theresa. (*advancing.*) My lord, you linger.

Colonna. Can you blame me, girl ?
Who would not linger here ? But I am gone. [*Exeunt.*]

END OF ACT FIRST.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Bianca's Apartment.*

Enter BIANCA.

Bianca. The noble mind, with intuition's skill,
Detects the noble mind ; and known 'tis loved.
'Tis so, nor will I seek, with feeble cunning,
To hide me from myself. Why should I blush
To own a heart alive to genuine worth ?
Why should I blush to own a kindred spirit
With his heroic soul ? oh how unlike
In every attribute of real worth,
To Florence's feeble sons !——
Of noblest birth, in nature's bounties rich,
Each outward act bespeaks his inward merit ;

The air of greatness, accent of command
 Unused to sue, and yet in suit resistless.
 Resistless?—I confess, to me resistless.
 Oh sudden revolution, reason doubts,
 And memory starts to look upon the past.
 Recall one little day and oh, how false,
 How wildly perjured would I deem that tongue,
 Which dare predict this waking of my soul
 To new and untried passions!—Yet 'tis nature.
 The maiden, passing through her girlish days
 Untouched by passion's fire, and attaining
 The full maturity of womanhood,
 Then, when at length she loves, she loves indeed!
 So the long smothered fire, breaking out,
 Shoots forth a fiercer flame; the mountain stream,
 Barred from its course by artificial bounds,
 With gathered force and fiercer from restraint,
 Bursts forth resistless on its wild career.

Enter SAVOLA.

My father here! what now has brought him hither?
Savola. Was ever state so cursed as hapless Florence?
 No peace, no rest, no quiet hour is hers.
 War's fierce, convulsive struggle hardly o'er,
 And the deceitful hope of harmony
 Just budding in our hearts—
 Forth the volcano bursts in civil strife,
 Mocks our fond hopes, and blasts the flower of peace.
 For you, poor Florence,
 External peace begets intestine war,
 And arms your cruel sons against each other.
 Compared with them your foreign foes are friends;
 They wound and hack the limbs, but your own sons
 Within your bosom bare their murderous swords,
 And in each other wound you at the heart.

Bianca. Father, how now! What is it moves you thus?

Savola. Why, know you not?—It was a leaden sleep
 That weighed your senses down, and stopped your ears
 To the tumultuous voices of the night.

B.

Bianca. I heard no more than loud and boisterous mirth:
What more occurred?

Savola. On the last night, our youth, so late returned,
Flushed with their victory, their tempers edged
Both with the want and license of the camp,
Held their wild orgies, every noble chief
His friends and followers feasting. Deep the draughts,
Loud are the shouts, and lengthened the carousal
Of soldiers after victory. At length,
The deep potations having done their work,
They sally out upon the peaceful night
In riotous bands, and ere its calming breath
Can cool their brains, full many a wild excess
Marks their mad course. But, by a luckless chance,
Two numerous bands in opposition met
Within a narrow street; one issuing forth
From the Uberti's halls, the other feasted
By the Donati. Deadly enmities
Divide their houses, and too oft their names
Have been the signal word for fatal strife.
Their friends and clients, now inflamed with wine,
Are nothing loath to prove their fiery zeal
For their good patrons' honour. Either band
Shout loud their war cry, and demand the way.
High words and blows in quick succession follow;
Fierce grows the strife, and still each new arrival
Adds fuel to the flame; till the Donati,
By numbers overpowered, yield the pass
To their exulting foes. On either part
Blood has been freely shed, and life been lost,
But more I know not—

Enter ANTONIO.

Brother, what with you?
Yet know you who have fallen in this fray?

Antonio. Carlo Donati is among the slain,
And many followers of either house
Have lost their lives. Dominic Uberti
Lies, gored with grievous wounds, in doubtful case.

Savola. Oh fatal chance, this but begins our troubles.

Soon shall we see those bloody feuds revived,
Which sapped our strength of old, which late we hoped
Were buried in oblivion.

Antonio. 'Tis too certain.
The fierce Donati muster now their friends,
And vow revenge on the Uberti's heads,
Who, nothing backward, summon their allies
To bring their aid in arms—
Each noble house, by blood or friendship swayed,
Or else impelled by hatred, now take part
In this detested quarrel. Kinsmen, friends,
Retainers, clients, all must lend their aid
To shake the tottering state. Soon shall we see
One half the city armed against the other.
E'en now the factious bands array themselves;
And edge their swords for suicidal war.

Savola. Alas, what can be done? How may we calm
This sudden storm?

[*Bianca listens with absorbed attention.*]

Antonio. When meet the Signiory?

Savola. This hour they meet; but they are powerless,
Divided 'mongst themselves, and destitute
Of strength and confidence.

Antonio. Yet something must be done. Bethink you
what.

Let them proclaim——

Savola. Talk not of proclamations.
Words cannot calm the fury of revenge,
Nor sheath the sword of faction.

[*Bianca starts as struck by some new thought.*]

Antonio. Let them then
Call on the friends of order to take arms
Against the first infringers of the peace.

Savola. That too were vain. The peaceful and the timid
Already house themselves, and bar their doors
Against the coming storm.

Antonio. Alas, I know not
What further to suggest.

Savola. Nor I, nor I:

Bianca. (*advancing boldly.*) Wilt thou then do nothing?

Dost thou delight to see the streets of Florence
Empurpled with her blood? Wilt thou do naught?

Savola. What can I do? I lack not will but power.
I am an old and peaceful man, my child.
You overrate me. I am powerless.

Bianca. You are not powerless. Long life, well used,
Has given you wisdom and authority.
The people love you, trust you, and are swayed
Full oft by your opinion.—Faint not now;
But at this troubled hour, patriot-like,
Stand boldly forth and point the way to safety.

Savola. I know it not.

Bianca. Then hark to me. Oft weakest instruments,
In heaven's hand, the greatest deeds achieve,
And by the idiot's tongue its wisdom speaks!
Go to the palace; cause the bells to ring
The summons to each citizen of Florence
To instant meeting in the public square.
Stand holdly forth before assembled Florence
And speak thou thus:

Amid the wild commotion of the times,
Intestine discord's strife, and foreign war,
We must intrust the safety of the state
Unto a single hand. With fearless voice
Demand their votes for him thou shalt propose.
Name a podesta—

Savola and Antonio. Whom?

Bianca. Whom but Colonna!

Savola and Antonio. Colonna! true.

Bianca. Who but Colonna, with undaunted soul,
Can stem the torrent of this wild commotion?
Can calm the riotous, control the proud,
And lay the tempest that would wreck the state?
Who but Colonna wields the present power
To bind sedition's arms? and who but he,
With either party wholly unallied,
Can deal impartial justice to the wronged
And him who wrongs him? Rust we now in peace,
And strive among ourselves for want of action?
Are Florence's foes asleep? Have they forgot

The road to Florence's gates? And who but he
Can tame the foes of Florence?—

For these seditious men, his name alone
Will tame their wildest rage; if not, his lance
Shall sweep the hardy rebels from our streets,
And quench the flames of faction in their blood!

Antonio. A wonder! that a youthful maiden's lips
Should teach the grey head wisdom!

Savola. 'Tis true, Colonna bears a dauntless soul;
He only wields the present needful power;
With either party wholly unallied,
He may be firm and just.—We are beset
With watchful foes, to whom this inbred strife
Will yield a fearful opening.—

Bianca. Sharp ills demand sharp cures. Full many a
state,
At some dread crisis, has to one intrusted
Her total power, to be by him restored
In peaceful safety.

Savola. And, alas, too oft,
Had bitter cause to mourn the misplaced trust.

Bianca. Nay, fear it not. Now on the eve of wreck
On discord's rock, gaze not beyond for dangers.

Antonio. Well urged. And if one must be made podestà,
Colonna is the one.

Savola. Come, brother, to the palace. We will urge,
With fearless voice on assembled Florence,
This wise and needful measure.

Bianca. Be bold, my father; paint in startling hues
The fearful ills encircling the state.—

[*Exeunt SAVOLA and ANTONIO.*]

Have I done well my father thus deceiving?—

Dissimulation's mask is new to me,
And conscience starts to gaze upon its features.
But why should conscience clog me with remorse?
I have but pointed out the safest path.

When private motives serve the public good,
Why should we not obey them? I waste time.
Colonna must be warned. [*sits and writes.*] And he is
wise;

A single word will warn him——
Theresa ! come.—I need you.

Enter THERESA.

Theresa. Here, my lady.

Bianca. This to Colonna—by some trusty hand,
With speed and secrecy.

Theresa. It shall be done. [*Exit.*

Bianca. (after a pause,) Who says that women have but
feeble souls ?

But narrow minds, and fearful, trembling hearts ?

Colonna, no ! I will be worthy of you !

I hope—but will not speak my budding hopes,

Till they be ripened to realities !

Exit.

SCENE II.—*An Apartment at Colonna's residence.*

Enter COLONNA and BERNARDO.

Colonna. You prove yourself a prophet, thus foretelling
The tumults of the night.

Bernardo. I well foresaw

That theirs would prove a Lapithæan feast :

First the red wine must flow to quench their thirst,

And then the redder blood to slake their fury.

Colonna. These Florentines grow valiant. Foreign foes,
Although combined and powerful, suffice not
Their fev'rous valour ; they must needs at home
Practise their bloody lessons on each other.—
But this makes me forgetful.

Last night, returning home, I found scarce one

Of all my train. Squires, pages, lackeys,

Each wandering forth upon his own good pleasure.

A clownish groom alone obeyed my call.

Is this the fitting order you preserve

Among my household !

Bernardo. My lord, there was not one of all your train
Not absent then upon your special service.

Colonna. How say you ? On my service ?

Bernardo. Upon your special service. Know you not
The feuds which have so long distracted Florence ?

The nobles' mutual hate, the people's rancour,
(Begot by wrongs, and insults, worse than wrongs)
Against their proud oppressors?

Colonna. What of that?

Bernardo. A moment's patience. Ancient feuds, revived,
Diffuse redoubled venom through the heart.
They quarrel for your good. Last night's excesses
Awake their ancient enmities; and I,
Fearing these revellers would slight their task
Of scorn and insult on the peaceful burghers,
Sent out your followers in several bands,
In the disguise of noble Florentines,
To wander through the streets and give free scope
To injury, and insult to the persons,
And peaceful dwellings of the citizens.
Such as would rouse the basest minds to vengeance—

Colonna. Ha! did they so?

Bernardo. With all the zeal for mischief which belongs
To the unthinking mind—

In every street and many a quiet dwelling
Insults to burghers, lewd, licentious offers
To wives and daughters freely dealt they out.
Then would they post away, each loudly calling
To his companions by some noble name,
Donati, Strozzi, Pazzi, or Uberti;
Thus leaving in the minds of common men
The stings of maddening hatred 'gainst the nobles.

Colonna. How dare you by such fiend befitting arts
Inflame men's minds, and widen thus the breach
Between the orders of a troubled state!

Bernardo. Because I thus can serve you. Aim you no
To grasp the reins of power, and to guide
This factious people with a monarch's hand?
Make wide this breach, and the more open lies
Ambition's path to your aspiring steps—

Colonna. Bernardo, I am new to crooked paths,
And love them not—Till lately all my ends
Were compassed by my sword, a trusty friend,
Who never yet has failed me.

Bernardo. My lord, forgive my bluntness—you are one

Who would be great, yet fain would shun the arts,
Which men must practice, to attain to greatness.
Were there a miry path before your steps,
And you beheld a paradise beyond,
Say, would you pause, and turn another way,
Lest in attaining it you should be soiled?
The paradise of power lies before you;
These are the filthy paths, which you must tread
Ere you attain it.

Colonna. True, they are filthy paths—
The wily politician's crooked arts,
Which better suit the cunning than the brave!

Bernardo. The crafty head, with politic resource,
Must aid the sword, too blunt an instrument
To smooth ambition's rugged path unaided.—
Say, have I not done well?

Colonna, (turning away.) Well—for your purpose—and
the better too,
In not consulting me—

Enter PAGE, who gives COLONNA a note, and Exit.

Ha! what is this?

(Reading.) "You soon may be podesta!—
The city needs you—Hold your power prepared
To march to Florence.

Bianca."

Bernardo. Who, my lord?

Colonna. It matters not—

How knows she that?—But I will take the warning.

Bernardo, speed to Pulci, to my band.

Lose not a moment; get them under arms,

And slowly lead towards Florence.

Bernardo.

I am gone. [*Going.*]

Colonna. It is but two short leagues, spare not your
horse—

[*Exit* BERNARDO.]

Is this man honest?—Am I wise to trust him?—

One who can stoop to such vile arts, although

Against his direst foe—

Could not preserve the balance of his faith,

If interest threw a feather in the scale

Against his nearest friend.—

And yet—he owes me much—I think he loves me.

He's mine, by gratitude and ties of blood—

Besides, his interests are bound up in mine,

And therefore will I trust him! [Exit.

SCENE III.—*An Apartment in Bondelmont's Palace.*

Enter BONDELMONT and DONATI.

Bondelmont. No, no, Donati, hope not for my aid.

At such a time, the state beset with foes,

Like lion circled with the hunters' toils;

At this wild time, when but a lucky blow

Has checked our foes, one moment us affording

To pause for breath, and edge our blunted swords

Against the coming strife!—At this dark hour

Must our mad nobles wake their rancorous feuds,

Pour forth their hoarded venom, and exhaust,

In civil war, the little vigour left

To our distracted country!

Oh tell it not in Pisa; whisper not

The hateful word in Lucca's hostile streets,

Lest our rejoicing foes their arms combine,

And seize this fatal hour for assault!

Donati. My brother has been slain by the Uberti,

Most vilely murdered by your foes and mine.

I would avenge his death, and ask your aid,

And straight you preach a tedious homily

On christian charity and love of country!—

Will you alone, of all our friends and kin,

Desert our righteous cause?

Bondelmont. My country's righteous cause demands my sword;

I wash my hands of this untimely quarrel:

'Tis treason 'gainst her safety. Would'st thou plot

With Florence' foes, and open wide her gates

To their besieging arms? Yet what is this

But to betray her, prostrate and disarmed,

To their revengeful hate?

Donati. Go, go; 'tis not

The patriot's love, but fear that prompts thy tongue.

Bondelmont. Dare you, Donati—[*Laying his hand on his sword.*]

But I will be calm.

And I will sooner bear a coward's name,
Than fight in such a quarrel!

Donati. Be it so.

We are enough, without your feeble aid,
To wreak revenge on the Uberti's heads.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE IV.—*Hall of the Signiory. The Signiory in session.*

Present, SAVOLA, ANTONIO, and Priors of the Arts.

Savola. Well met in council, brothers; never yet
Was state in greater need of wisdom's aid
Than Florence at this hour! Her noblest sons,
Made drunk with wrath, and maddened by revenge,
Strike at her very life. Her laws defied,
The fierce Uberti and the proud Donati
Wage murderous war, and every noble house
Unfurls its banner to partake the strife!
Through every gate their rustic vassals pour;
In ruffian throngs they bring their servile swords
To their commanding lords, spurred on by hope
Of plunder, and demoniack love of strife.
Convulsions fierce now shake the tottering state,
Beset within, without, by direst ills;
God grant some speedy remedy be found,
Or she is lost indeed! Who here will offer
His counsel for her safety?—

First Prior. Let's issue out; call on the trades to arm;
Proclaim rewards, a thousand florins each,
To that good citizen who brings the head
Of either leader of the factious bands;
Uberti and Donati, let their heads
Acquit the debt their outrage owes the state.

Savola. 'Tis easier said than done.

Second Prior. How! would'st thou thus
Crush innocence with guilt? The true Uberti

Stand but on their defence; nor seek they aught
But honourable peace. 'Tis the Donati,
Ever contentious, cruel, proud and false,
Would swim our streets with blood!

Third Prior. 'Tis false! Your tongue belies a noble name.

Carlo Donati's blood, in murder shed,
Against his murderers cries aloud for justice!

Second Prior. Donati's blood, that swells within your veins,

Not what has been poured forth, now prompts your tongue.
The ties of kindred warp your partial soul,
Inclining you to aid the wrongful cause.

Third Prior. 'Tis false!

Second Prior. I say 'tis true!

Well do you know Donati met his death,
Richly deserved, in murderous assault
Upon a peaceful band of mirthful friends.

[SAVOLA whispers to ANTONIO, who goes out.]

Third Prior. Thou art but the Uberti's hired pleader,
Their slavish vassal with a gold bought tongue?

Savola. Stay, anger driven men! Is this the wisdom—
Are these the temperate minds, which you should bring
Unto your country's counsels. Treason sits
E'en at her council board, for your dissensions
Arc treason 'gainst her safety! Not to you,
But to assembled Florence I appeal.

I to her sons will plead their country's cause,
And point the way to safety! [Alarm bell rung.]

Several. (starting up,) What means that bell?

Savola. 'Tis rung at my command!

Already wait before your council doors
A crowd of citizens, with hearts that throb
To learn their country's doom. You would betray her.
But that loud summons will each patriot call
To swell their numbers, and to them I go
To ask their aid for Florence!

[Exit Savola.]

[The rest rise and follow tumultuously.]

SCENE V.—*BIANCA's Apartment. Shouts at a distance.*

Enter BIANCA.

Bianca. (Listening) Oh, I am torn 'twixt warring hopes and fears—

To be so near at hand, yet powerless
To aid Colonna's cause! The people's shouts
Ring in mine ears, as though some mighty question
Of good or evil hung upon their lips.
So loud and fierce their cries, I dare not hope
That approbation prompts their clamorous tongues.
Perhaps they have refused to trust Colonna!
There is no counting on the giddy people.
A word, a look, a motion may offend—
With the ill judging crowd, the wisest measure,
At an ill moment urged, with words unapt
To please their fancies and their pride to flatter,
And they will spurn alike the orator
And that which he may urge.—I should have schooled
My father better. Oh, could I transfer
My spirit to his person! could I place
My words upon his lips, I would so paint
The horrid evils born of civil war;
The fearful risks from ever watchful foes;
The matchless worth of this heroic chief;
That they with joyous and concordant shouts
Would rend the skies, proclaiming him their lord!

[Distant shouts of "Colonna."]

Ha! was it but the echo of my hopes?—
I do not dream.—They shout his name.—The bells
Ring out a merry peal, and joyous cries
Assist their clamorous tongues!—
I have attained the summit of my hopes;
The senate's voice, the merry sounding bells,
The people's shout, proclaim him lord of Florence!

Enter SAVOLA.

Already here! Speak, father; have you prospered?

Savola. 'Tis done. Colonna now bears rule in Florence.

Bianca. For that let heaven be praised!

Savola. I hope 'tis for her good.

Bianca. But say, how was it?

Savola. Scarcely did I breathe
The subject to their ears; scarce had I named
Colonna, when a simultaneous shout
Burst wildly forth, and ready demagogues,
Feeling the people's pulse, and ever prompt
To feed their wayward fancies, second me,
And go beyond me far.—

The people sick of anarchy, oppressed
By wild misrule, now rush from one extreme
Unto the other, and proclaim Colonna
Podesta, and the Captain of the Wars,
For three long years, with powers undefined
To crush the factious and preserve the state.

Bianca. Then let the factious tremble!

Savola. Ha! you seem
To thrill with joy, and with triumph swell
At that which I narrate,—What special cause—

Bianca. There needs no special cause.—
A Florentine, I would not see my country
Destroyed by her sons; a feeble maid,
I tremble at the sight of lawless force;
And as a Christian, shudder to behold
Men shed the blood of brothers and deface
Their maker's image! Well may we rejoice
At these averted woes!

Savola. May they so prove,
Nor be by worse replaced. But I am sick
Of these commotions, and would fain retire
Beyond the hearing of the wild uproar. [*Exit SAVOLA.*]

Bianca. Ride on Colonna, on; may prosperous gales
Thy banner wave, good fortune edge thy sword! [*Exit.*]

END OF ACT SECOND.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*An Apartment in the Palace.**Enter COLONNA, as Podesta.*

Colonna. I have not merely dreamed ambition's dream,
 But am awake, and grasp the promised power!
 Distracted Florence called me to her aid,
 And I have stilled her tumults, calmed her fears,
 And struck the sword from the uplifted arm
 Of rebel faction with the lightning's speed.
 The factious tremble now beneath mine eye;
 Their leaders undergo the stern award
 Of violated law.—With fond confiding faith,
 Of me—of me alone she seeks protection
 From outward foes and anarchy within—
 Podesta and the Captain of the Wars—
 That sound is sweet. Thanks to their craven fears,
 No limit to my power but the time—
 Three years—Before three slow revolving years
 Have run their destined course, how deep a root
 May not my power have taken.
 The dazzling glory of successful fields
 May blind the eyes, and firm, impartial justice
 Shall win the hearts of many!—
 If these wars hold, and well I trust they will,
 Dissension shall want leisure to uprear
 Her Hydra heads!—
 But let me not forget this peerless maid.
 Sure 'tis by magic that she thus foretells,
 Nay, more, controls the voice of shouting crowds,
 Who echo thus her will.

Enter BERNARDO.

Bernardo. I come, my lord, to know your further
 pleasure.

Colonna. Is execution done upon the rebels,
 I yesterday condemned?

Bernardo. 'Tis done, my lord.

Colonna. Five heads have fallen—They are not enough
To calm the angry law—'Tis not enough.
The commons will complain I slack in zeal.
'To-morrow's dawn, and young Lamberti's spirit
Must quite his frame and wing its doubtful flight
As those who died to-day—

I fain would bid him live, but must not spare him—
Say, have you posted guards at every gate,
And ordered parties to patrol the streets?

Bernardo. 'Tis done as you commanded.

Colonna. Since then internal order is restored,
We now may think upon external foes.
Bernardo, we are weak; Florence is weak,
And needs some aid against this mighty league,
Which clogs her efforts with its leaden weight.
Where shall we turn?

Bernardo. What think you of Visconti?

Colonna. He loves not Florence.

Bernardo. You he may assist,
Though, late, he loved her not. *Colonna's* Florence
Is not the same with that distracted state;
Whose mob-ruled liberties he justly feared
Might rouse his subjects to regret the loss
Of liberties they once so highly prized.

Colonna. What! think you that Visconti may become
Colonna's friend, though not the friend of Florence?

Bernardo. Visconti knows your worth. In needful hour
He has not staid to count the paltry price
At which he bought your aid; now less than ever,
For you are now, for three brief years, a king.

Colonna. A king!—
'Tis true, I am a king! Save that my rule
Is checked and circumscribed by measured term,
I wield as wide prerogative as he
Upon whose brow a lineal crown descends!
Why should the future mar the present hour?

Bernardo. Then bind yourself to great Visconti's love
By ties of mutual interest.

Colonna. That is my policy—It shall be so.

Enter two NOBLES.

But who come here ? Speak, noble sirs, what seek you ?

First Noble. We come your suppliants. The common will

Has clothed you in the attributes of power,
And we approve the trust. We recognise
The majesty of Florence in your person.
The power to punish, and, oh, nobler far !
The power to pardon rest with you alone—

Colonna. I know my power. Say briefly what you ask.

Second Noble. Lamberti's life.

Colonna. Lamberti's life ! Impossible ; what plea
For pardon can you urge ? Seized in the act !
His hands yet reeking with his victim's blood ;
Our proclamation's echo scarcely hushed
Denouncing instant death on all who dare
Profane the peace of Florence ? Can you ask
For such offenders pardon ?

Second Noble. Let me urge

His youth, his injuries——

Colonna. You sue in vain.

I stand not here to play a puppet's part,
The scarecrow of the law, to fright the timid,
And be the while the scoff of bolder spirits.
I must betray my trust, or with strong hand
Must wield the sword of power, and mete out
Unbiased justice on each rank offence,
Whoever the offender !

First Noble. Already,

At your decree, the blood of guilty men
Has paid the dues of justice. Youth is rash,
Yet teachable, and may be well restrained
By milder means than death. Famed as you are,
No plume of victory can so adorn
Your helm as gentle mercy. O be merciful.

Colonna. I am most merciful when least I seem so.
Unsparring justice on the guilty head,
Is mercy to the state. There is no end
To rapine, violence and fell revenge,
But stern awards of justice !

First Noble. Yet, oh, bethink you, 'tis an only son,
The lonely offspring of a noble line,
Which now must end in him. His forefathers
In peace and war have nobly served their country,
Nor asked of her reward. Let their achievements
Redeem the fault of hot and hasty youth,
And to his wretched parents yield their son.

[*Colonna walks slowly away.*]

Bernardo. My lord, be not too firm; make these your
friends.

Would you win hearts? show gentle elemency.
Assume soft pity, though you feel it not;
It is a weakness that oft blinds the crowd;
It is ambition's surest road to power.

Colonna. You counsel well.—Then be it so.—My
friends,

God knows that I abhor the sight of blood
Deliberately shed. My trade of war
Has not so steeled my heart, but I lament
A mother's anguish and a father's groan,
An only son bemoaning.—Let him live,
But as a banished man, till healing time
Shall close the self-inflicted wounds of Florence.

Second Noble. As merciful as just. 'Tis not in words
That we, your friends, will thank you, great Colonna.

Colonna. Farewell, my friends, and send him quickly
hence.

First Noble. We will, without delay. My lord, farewell.
[*Exeunt.*]

Colonna, (looking after them.) I trust they now are mine.
But I must hence. [Exit COLONNA.]

Bernardo. 'Twas as well done as though myself had
done it.

My noble chief grows politic. He soon
Will need no counsellor, and I, alas,
Be out of office.—

A soaring spirit his, that fain would climb
While aught remains above at which to reach.
I love him well, and would not see him lost.
No; were my fortunes unallied to his,
I would not sorrowless behold his fall.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—*Bianca's Apartment.**Enter COLONNA, leading in BIANCA.*

Colonna. Escaped from cares of state, I come to thee.
 Too much of toil would my honours bring,
 Did not this stolen hour thus reward
 The labours of the day.

Bianca. Almost I feared,
 Amid the tumult of these stirring scenes,
 Thou hadst forgot that such a being was
 As poor Bianca.

Colonna. When I shall forget
 Bianca, may my arm forget its skill
 To wield the knightly sword; my tongue the word,
 At which a thousand lances, laid in rest,
 Assert Colonna's right. As frost before the sun,
 May my strong armour melt before the spear;
 My warhorse flounder in the battle's shock,
 And hurl me on the mercy of my foe!

Bianca. Forgive my doubts; 'twas but my woman's heart
 By nature prone to fear. Why should I fear?
 Thy worth, if not my own, will make thee true.

Colonna. To doubt my truth were not to know thyself;
 Or deem me but a madman, who would cast
 A priceless jewel to the yawning sea.

Bianca. Nay, I no more will doubt. Let me rejoice
 At that which has befallen you. Already
 The smiles of fortune gild your proudest hopes,
 E'en as the loftiest summits first reflect
 The strong refulgence of the coming day.

Colonna. True, fortune shines upon me. I am now
 Podesta and the Captain of the Wars,
 For three long years, to the good state of Florence.

Bianca. Even this
 I fondly hoped, yet scarcely dared to hope—
 To thee belongs the leading of our arms?

Colonna. To me, and me alone.

Bianca. And thou the judge,
 To whose tribunal the contending come
 To hear the law's decree?

Colonna.

I am that judge.

The power of life and death, the war's direction,
Each attribute that marks a monarch's rule,
For three long years, the common voice bestows.

Bianca. The lord of Florence!—and for three long
years!—

Three years will have an end. Bianca's hopes
Would more than echo the rude commons' voice,
And hail thee lord for ever!

Colonna. Would it were so.

Bianca. And may it not be so?

Colonna. Such things have chanced.

Bianca. Why may they not again?

It were a blessing to our troubled state.
Tumultuous Florence, through your steadfast rule,
Impartial, firm and just, might soon attain
A happiness she never yet has known.—
Are you content

With three brief years of rule? Methinks, to me,
It were an arduous task to lay aside
The leader's truncheon from the accustomed hand,
Or from the proud tribunal to descend,
And mingle as an equal in the throng,
To whom so late my every word was law!

Colonna. Nor will I ever!—Unto you, Bianca,
Within whose breast a lofty spirit towers
Above your sex's weakness, I unfold
My inmost thoughts. Think not I lack ambition.
Lofty ambition is the soldier's spur
To each adventurous deed. And did I lack,
In my own breast, the ardour to pursue
Ambition's glorious course, in you I trust
To gain a Mentor who can still arouse
My drooping soul to renovated vigour.

Bianca. Your surest Mentor you will ever find
In your own valour and heroic worth.

Colonna. Hear me Bianca; unto you I owe
One half my present power. My pride would wince
So much to owe to any but yourself;
But willingly to you I owe my power,
And, dearer yet, will owe my happiness.

Say not that I presume;
 For you have listened to my words of love,
 With blushing smiles responding to my vows.—
 When will Bianca to Colonna give
 Her plighted faith by sacred rites confirmed!
 Shall it be soon? What obstacle remains?
 Will not your father willingly intrust
 His daughter to the care, to which he trusts
 His country's safety?—Shall it not be soon?

Bianca. (About to give her hand, but withdrawing it suddenly.)

No, soon it cannot be. I would be now
 A burden on your progress. Was it not
 Bianca's father, who the people moved
 To make you what you are? Should you now take
 Bianca for your bride, suspicion's tongue
 Would whisper ye were leagued in secret plot
 Against the good of Florence, and beget
 Keen sighted jealousies, and watchful fears,
 Which would but thwart our hopes. No, wait we must.
 When thou, (thy new born power by time confirmed,)
 The dread of Florence' foes, her strong support
 'Gainst outward force and fierce intestine strife,
 Need fear no change, then mayst thou boldly wed
 Thy chosen bride.—

Colonna. Not so, why should we heed
 The sullen murmurs of a stingless crew,
 For ever scoffing at the power they dread?
 Not fear, but coldness, makes you now to pause.
 You love me not.

Bianca. Then never woman loved.

Colonna. You do not love me, or you would not trust
 Eventful time with what you hold most dear,
 When now it might be yours. Trust not too far;
 My mind perhaps may change!

Bianca. I fear no change.
 I know your noble heart, and scorn to doubt.

Colonna. Bianca, that you love me, I believe;
 And 'tis your love that conjures up these fears.
 Mark then my words, and own them baseless fears.

Upon a strong foundation stands my rule :
 The power and authority of law,
 The zealous people's love, my trusty band,
 Who never knew defeat, support my fortunes.
 The commons love me; even now they prate
 Of humbled nobles and defeated foes;
 Of victory, of plenty and of peace;
 And, as the source of these, they bless Colonna.

Bianca. You know not Florence and her fickle sons!
 Trust not the people's favour! Though your worth
 Be like the oak, with its earth grasping roots,
 A solid, firm, and never shaken mass—
 Your popularity is like its shade,
 An ever everchanging, unsubstantial thing.
 Oh trust it not! Make yourself strong in friends,
 At home, abroad; and swell your martial band
 With daring, trusty hearts. Watch well the wayward,
 Nor let the stagnant humours of dull peace
 Ferment to brew you trouble.

Colonna. Well advised.
 So young, so gentle, yet so wise withal?

Bianca. If I am wise, 'tis love has made me wise.
 For love taught hopes and fears, and they teach wisdom.
 Within a few brief days, intenser thoughts,
 More wild emotions have convulsed my soul,
 Than through the sluggish course of by-gone years.—
 How tame, how cold, my former life to this!

Colonna. Delightful sound! Repeat those words once
 more.

Or give one other proof of your affection—

[Attempts to kiss her.]

Bianca. Let this suffice :

Bianca's heart contains no hope but these :

Colonna's glory and Colonna's love.

And now, away, away.

[Retiring.]

Colonna. What, part so soon! At such a moment
 leave you?

Bianca. Nay, now you must obey me.

Colonna. Unwilling I obey. Now then farewell.

{Exit.

Bianca. He loves me —
 I trust he loves me, as I would be loved—
 If not, how am I sunk!

[*Exit.*

SCENE III.—*An Apartment in the Palace.*

Enter COLONNA and BERNARDO.

Colonna. All now goes well. On an unruffled sea
 The swelling tide and gentle gale of fortune
 Still bear me onward, and I have in view
 The long desired haven. Time and means,
 The ripe occasion and the power to seize it,
 Which are the elements of our success,
 Contend to aid me.

Bernardo. Nothing now remains
 But that you promptly seize the proffered aid,
 Nor cast away your fortunes.

Colonna. Fear it not.
 Each opportunity I have impressed
 To toil in my behalf; and will impress
 Those that are yet to come. The populace,
 Who hate the haughty nobles, I have won
 With gentle courtesy and scattered gold;
 And am become the idol of their fancy.
 So much for favour; and to swell my force,
 Five hundred lances, raised in Lombardy,
 Shall re-inforce my band. For Lombardy
 Is full of daring hearts and trusty swords,
 That pant for war, and rust for want of use.
 And well I trust that Milan's potent aid—

Bernardo. That may be yours, and upon such condition
 As binds him yours for ever.

Colonna. Say you so?

Bernardo. There is a letter in Visconti's hand.
 What will you give for Milan's potent aid?

Colonna. (*Taking, but not opening the letter,*)
 What does he ask? I will not be his vassal,
 Nor hold a crown of him! Excepting that,
 I will not boggle at his harsh conditions.

Bernardo. He offers none. Visconti holds you dear,

And looks upon you as a rising spirit,
 Whose friendship he would win. He fain would see
 Your power take root and flourish, till its boughs
 In lasting verdure overspread the state.
 This to attain, he offers here the aid,
 That money, men, and influence afford,
 And, as the pledge of his eternal faith,
 His daughter's hand—

Colonna. His daughter's hand! Ha, villain, 'twas thine offer!

By heaven! thou hast overstepped thine office
 To barter thus——

Bernardo. How, my lord! What means this violence?
 Visconti's offer is most generous,
 And may not be refused.—

Colonna. How! know you not
 That I am bound by love and plighted faith
 To wed Bianca?

Bernardo. Wed her, did you say?
 Is this no passing amour?

Colonna. Know you not
 Her influence has made me what I am?

Bernardo. I thought it was your sword, that trusty
 friend,
 That made you what you are.

Colonna. Am I become
 My follower's scorn? Presumptuous man—

[*Threatens him.*]

Bernardo. My lord,
 Do not forget I too am a Colonna!—
 Your kinsman, confidant and steadfast friend
 Still have I followed, aided, and advised you.
 You cannot doubt my truth—then mark my words.

Colonna. Say what you please, but do not think to
 move me.

Bernardo. Frail is the tenure of your present power,
 The fickle people's will. Without allies,
 No stanch adherents but the few good spears
 That cluster round your banner, do not hope
 To stem the torrent of the people's rage.

Roused and united as they soon may be,
 Led by the nobles, strengthened with allies,
 They cannot fail to drive you singly forth—
 Then look abroad for aid. Who, like Visconti,
 With treasure, arms and influence can prop
 Your doubtful cause?—Backed by Visconti's power,
 You may defy the malecontents around you.
 Let the proud nobles champ upon the bit;
 The frantic people struggle with their bonds;
 With Milan's aid your iron grasp controls them!

Colonna. Shall I forego the glorious feast of love?
 Betray a noble, pure and generous heart,
 Clothed in an angel form? If ever woman
 Has known a pure and a devoted love,
 Such love she bears to me!

Bernardo. For shame, my lord!
 This is the whining of a love-sick boy.
 Pardon my boldness, I but cross my friend
 To do him service.

Colonna. You argue thus, because you know her not.
 She is the loveliest and the sweetest flower,
 That nature's cunning handiwork e'er wrought.

Bernardo. Grant that she be. Contending in a race,
 A glorious prize in view, thou would'st not pause
 To pluck the fairest flower nature e'er
 Displayed to mortal eye.

Colonna. I would seize both.
 Love claims his right in every noble heart.
 Ambition may possess the greater share,
 But not usurp the whole. She shall be mine,
 E'en at the hazard of ambitious hopes!
 I will increase my levies; I will raise
 In Florence' self the treasure to secure
 Their needful aid; I will seek other friends,
 Whose strong alliance shall maintain my cause
 Without Visconti's aid. I will not yield her!
 No, not even to ambition!

Bernardo. Art thou Colonna?—who for glory lived,
 And vowed to serve no mistress but ambition?
 That no fond passion for an artful sex

Should ever tempt thee from thy steadfast course
To rove in paths of pleasure?—Once I hoped—
That hope has fled, and I foresee thy doom.—

Colonna. What is my doom?

Bernardo. Thou, in thy new Elysium of love,
Shalt while away thine hours in golden dreams,
Grasping at airy crowns! And in thy sleep
Ascend a throne, and—on a scaffold wake!

Colonna. Is that my doom? Not so! ere all be lost
The sword shall end Colonna! [Turns away.]

Bernardo. Art thou so blind, infatuated, lost
In love's delirium, that thou must rush
To the abyss that swallows up thy hopes?
Recall thy wisdom and mark well my words.

Colonna. Say on, I mark you.

Bernardo. There is no middle path. Visconti's love
Is yours by this alliance. That refused,
His deadly enmity is ever yours,
And well you know his power!

Colonna. (*musings.*) I fear 'tis so.—Without Visconti's
aid—

Nay more, with fell Visconti for my foe!
His policy and power in the scale
That weighs against my fortune, I were lost
Beyond the aid of chance!—
Alas, I fear my very faith would prove
Her ruin and my own!

Enter PAGE.

Page. My lord, a letter.

Colonna. (*Takes the letter. Exit Page.*)

Ha—'tis from Bianca.

Bernardo. An ill timed note.—It mars my argument.

[*Aside.*]

Colonna. (*Reading. Bernardo listens attentively.*)

"Colonna, I have heard a foolish tale,
But think not I believe it. It is said
That you would wed the daughter of Visconti,
And thus confirm your power"—

Bernardo. How learned she that? [*Aside.*]

Colonna. (*Reading.*) "Forgive me; though I know that
it be false,

Yet would I gladly hear your lips deny it."—
 Poor, fearful girl, the trembling slave of love!

Bernardo. Ambition's slave! Thou art the slave of love.

Colonna. Ambition?

Bernardo. True, she loves you—for your fame!

She loves—the leader of a thousand lances,
 The podesta of Florence! and, no doubt,
 Would better love its king!—Aspiring maid,
 Thou hast a towering spirit that would soar
 The eagle's flight, nor stoop at petty game!

Colonna. Can it be so?

Bernardo. She would not wed a man unknown to fame,
 Although yourself were him. Nay, did she doubt
 Of your success in your aspiring hopes —

Colonna. By heaven, 'tis true! She did refuse to wed
 Until my power was confirmed in Florence
 Beyond the fear of change!

Bernardo. Ha, did she so?

A lucky hit. [*aside.*] She then refused to wed?

Colonna. She did.

Bernardo. There needs no more. Or if there need,
 That letter is the proof. How learned she that?
 You have been dogged by her suspicious fears.
 She loves you not. True love is not suspicious.
 That you yourself can witness, deeming her
 A saint in purity and spotless faith.

Colonna. By heaven! never did suspicion dawn
 On my confiding soul!

Bernardo. Because you loved her.

She has no love or faith, by which to weigh
 Your love and faith to her. But, deep in art
 Beyond her artful sex, she thus would share
 In your successful fortunes, should you thrive,
 But should you fail, she will not share your ruin.

Colonna. It cannot be—So young, and yet so artful?—
 It cannot be!—*Bernardo*, you belie her.

Bernardo. Let it be so!—I have but this to say:
 That path leads to ambition, this to love.
 Thou canst not travel on two different roads,
 At the same time their several goals pursuing.

Then choose between them. Wilt thou cleave to love?
 Forswear ambition; vail thy towering hopes;
 Cast off thine arms, assume the shepherd's crook,
 His plaintive pipe; get thee some silly sheep,
 And with thy Chloe wander o'er the fields,
 And sooth thy soul with love and melody—
 If that thy Chloe love Colonna's self,
 And not Colonna's power!—My lord farewell. [Going.

Colonna. Whither, Bernardo?

Bernardo. To seek my fortunes elsewhere!

Colonna. What! would you leave me? Am I not the
 head

Of old Colonna's house?

Bernardo. A prudent man will leave a falling house,
 Although it be the mansion of his sires!
 When the unskillful pilot has our ship
 Imbedded fast amid the sunken rocks,
 We fain would quit the fated vessel's deck,
 And trust for safety to another bark.
 Once more, my lord, farewell.

Colonna. Darc you desert me?

Bernardo. You desert yourself!

But be again Colonna; I again
 Will be your faithful follower.

Colonna. (*After a mental struggle, throwing the letter
 behind him.*)

Bernardo, you have conquered; I no more
 Will dream of love, but wake me to ambition.

Bernardo. Thou art again Colonna!

Colonna I will—I will forget her. I will drown
 Her image in the stern alarms of war!
 Will she forget?

Bernardo. No more, no more of that.

Colonna. Yet one word more—That letter must be
 answered.

Bernardo. (*Taking it up.*) Leave that, my lord, to me.
 You are but new resolved. It may unman you.

Colonna. Then do it quickly.— [A pause. Ber-
 nardo writes. Colonna walks about much agitated.
 —Tut, she will forget.

'Twill seem a fleeting dream, and she will find
 Another, and a fitter—Ha, another!
 Possessed of her, on whom I had set my hopes
 Of pure connubial bliss! No more, no more!
 Come, thou art slow—too slow—Would it were over.

Bernardo. Sign this my lord. (*Colonna is about to read.*

Bernardo covers it with his hand.

Why need you read what can but give you pain?

Colonna. 'Tis signed. Away with it. Now bustle,
 bustle;

I will review my lances; I will think
 Of naught but glorious war and kingly power!

Bernardo. No meaner thought becomes your martial
 soul.

Colonna. God-like ambition shall exalt me far
 Above the meaner passions that perplex
 The inconstant mind of man. I now have launched
 My fortunes on ambition's boundless sea,
 And there will sink or swim!

[*Exit.*

Bernardo. Is it not strange
 The strong should be so weak? A warrior's soul
 Should thus be trammelled by a woman's arts?
 But well I trust the artful snare is broken.

[*Exit.*

SCENE IV.—*Bianca's Apartment.*

Enter BIANCA.

Bianca. Why comes he not? 'Tis now the accustomed
 hour,
 From which I count the minutes of the day.
 So many hours since I saw him last;
 So many hours ere I shall again
 Behold his glorious form, and hear, entranced,
 The music of his voice, which awakes
 My thrilling heart to sense of future bliss—
 To be the partner of his inmost thoughts,
 Partaker of his pleasures and his hopes,
 To share his grandeur and the dangers share,
 Which still on grandeur wait, will be my joy!—
 Why comes he not?

Perhaps he thinks not of me, but is lost
 In toils of state and warlike preparation—
 Of him I hold but a divided heart,
 While he of me usurps a heart entire,
 Which knows no hope, no fear, no thought but him—
 I do him wrong. He is perplexed with cares.
 My father's gloomy brow betrays regret,
 That he became the ladder upon which
 Colonna mounted high—His broken hints
 Of jealous nobles, discontented commons,
 Oppression, usurpation and revolt,
 Betray the moody murmurs rise in Florence,
 And whisper danger to Colonna's rule.—
 I do him wrong—
 He is o'erwhelmed with toils that detain
 Those captive hours which would fain be mine.

Enter THERESA.

Theresa. A letter, lady, by Colonna's page.

Bianca. How now!—A letter? Then my fears are true.
 He will not, cannot come.—Theresa hence.
 I now would be alone.—

[*Exit THERESA.*

This tell tale tremour speaks my heart too plainly.

I will have none to witness my emotions—

With what fond vows he'll aim to calm my fears.

Will he resent my half assumed suspicions?

[*Opens the letter eagerly—starts.*

'Tis not his hand;—and yet—'tis signed by him!

(*Reads.*) "Hope not, fond girl—to be Colonna's bride!

Wake from thine idle dream, and—know thyself!

A soldier's toy!—fit for an hour's sport!

Thou art no more! Forget—thou art forgot!

Colonna!"

(*Staring wildly round.*) I stand. I read—"Tis so!

Sinks on one knee and hides her face. A pause.

No—I will live! From my deep, maddening wrongs!

I will draw strength.—Colonna, I have stooped,

And thou hast spurned me. I will rise and live! [*Rising.*

To pay thee back thy scorn! Revenge! Revenge! [*Exit.*

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*Bianca's Apartment.*

Enter BIANCA.

Bianca. I must be calm. Fierce passions wear us out,
Or drive us mad!—Awake, revengeful thoughts,
Asleep, more bloody dreams infest me still.
My eager hand grasps at the imagined knife,
I see the traitor helpless at my feet,
But passion's fury still defeats itself,
I wake too soon to deal the fatal blow.
Thirsting for vengeance, I neglect the means
To make that vengeance mine.—
Mine is no woman's heart;—to sit and weep
A lover lost, or else to seek another,
Might well become a feeble, puling girl.—
Ha! beauty, wealth! what are ye? You but teach
The ardent mind to cherish lofty hopes,
And give a keener edge to disappointment.
And are ye also powerless for revenge?—
Where are my host of suitors? Where are they,
Who knelt and sighed, and vowed themselves my slaves?
E'en if they love me not, they love my wealth,
And shall become the tools of my revenge!
I will reverse the dream of alchymists,
And turn my gold to steel!—
Let me but live—live until that blest hour,
When his aspiring hopes, his usurped power
Shall crumble into dust; his traitor's heart,
More false than proud, more proud than pitiless,
Is crushed like mine. Then will I ask no more.—
Yet should he fall, and I be not the cause
Of his just doom, revenge remains unsated.

[Soft music without.]

Ha, music!—How it jars upon mine ear,
Marred by the tempest of discordant thoughts.
Away fond youth, forbear thy sickly strains,
Nor nightly urge thy worse than hopeless suit.
My thoughts are demons, and thy swelling strain

The bitter irony, that taunts the damned!
 No more! (*stops her ears.*) Yet stay. Oh happy, happy
 thought!
 Thy melody would only paint thy love,
 Yet truly points the way to my revenge.
 'Theresa!—Girl!—Where are you?

Enter THERESA.

Theresa. Here, my lady.

What are your commands?

Bianca. Who's that below?—

Who thus disturbs my peace?

Theresa. Know you not, lady?

Noble Bondelmont nightly thus makes known

Your beauty and his love.

Bianca. What would he have of me?

Theresa. An interview,

If you will grant him one.

Bianca. Admit him then.

Theresa. Admit him! Lady, do I understand you?

Bianca. Thou fool! obey me and admit him straight.

Say I for once will see him—but to show

Why he no more must seek me. Hence! begone.

Theresa. What may this mean? I trust she is not mad.

[*Aside. Exit THERESA.*

Bianca. Brave, noble, powerful, wealthy and beloved

By all the youth of Florence.—

Though little known in arms, in gentler arts

Without a rival. His the open heart,

The frank demeanour and the liberal hand,

That wins the love of all. E'en formal age

O'erlooks the lively sallies of his youth,

And smiles in kindness on him.—Such a man,

Roused to ambition, or the patriot's zeal,

May dart his fire through a thousand hearts,

And lead a thousand daring arms to aid

The cause he may espouse.—Long has he sought me,

Loves truly, and betrays, at every glance,

The look that speaks the willing, eager slave

Of my imperious will!—He is the tool,

Wherewith I'll work the ruin of my foe!—

Enter BONDELMONT and THERESA.

Bondelmont. This happiness I scarcely dared to hope,
And know not how to thank you.—

Bianca. Girl, away ! [*Exit THERESA.*]
Now you are here, young lord, say what you seek !
That nightly thus you loiter in the street
Beneath my window ?

Bondelmont. Need I say, Bianca ?
I ask but leave to tell you of my love,—
To pay my ardent vows where they are due,—
To hope that time may yield to my devotion
The object of my vows—Bianca's love.

Bianca. My love !— Why should I love you ?
What have you done that may deserve my love ?
If person, manner, and exterior grace
May challenge love, you well may hope for favour.
But not from me. 'Tis not the deep drawn sigh,
The ardent glance, the nightly serenade
Can master my affections.—
I must esteem, approve, before I love.

Bondelmont. And can you not esteem me ?
Am I then so unworthy, so deceived
By flattering friends, who tell me that I am
What I should be, and well become my station ?

Bianca. 'Tis false, young lord ; you are not what you
should be—
Is all your pride to be the gayest reveller ?
The height of your ambition, to be first
In pleasure's giddy chase ? For shame, for shame !
Kind nature formed thee to far nobler ends ;
The fault is thine, who dost pervert her gifts
To worthless occupations.

Bondelmont. Is this my crime ?
I lead a gay, but not licentious life.
They slander me who otherwise report me.

Bianca. A life of gayety, in trifles spent,
Thy native powers degrading.—
Where thou dost lead, the noble youth of Florence
Pursue in throngs the revel and the mask.
Canst thou not lead them to a nobler game,

The battles of their country ?—Is it fear ?
 Thy followers' terrors, or their leader's fears,
 That bar the road to glory ?

Bondelmont. Florence now,
 Long worn with foreign and intestine war,
 Tastes of sweet peace, and shall I break her rest ?
 Yet must your love be won. Point out the path,
 And think not I will shrink from aught that may
 Become a noble and a Florentine.

Bianca. Art thou a noble and a Florentine !
 And yet—Colonna lives—the lord of Florence !

Bondelmont. He is podesta !—To no native hand,
 Divided as we are by feuds and factions,
 Can we intrust the power of the law,
 And hope impartial justice. 'Tis the curse
 Brought down by endless quarrels on our heads ;
 Nor am I, in submitting to his rule,
 The less a noble.

Bianca. Oh, willing-blinded slave,—he is your lord !
 The king of Florence ! The judicial sway,
 The public purse, the power of the sword,
 Are in his grasp ;—what more can he desire ?
 Let her, too late repenting, ask again
 The power she lately gave, and mark his answer !

Bondelmont. There is a startling justice in your fears.
 Colonna wields his new intrusted power
 With zealous spirit and a vigorous arm ;
 A lofty spirit his, and boundless power
 Has ever been the lust of noblest minds.
 They who would scorn temptation, in the garb
 Of sensual pleasure, or the miser's hoard,
 Oft bow before ambition's shrine, to own
 The God of their idolatry.—

But have you, lady, aught beyond suspicion ?—

Bianca. Suspicion !—We suspect that we are slaves !
 And must we pause until suspicion grow
 To fearful certainty ?—Mark this, young lord ;
 The very tongue that first did name Colonna
 To be podesta, on that luckless hour
 Now heaps its curses !

Bondelmont. Ha! your father then—

Bianca. He will not tell you so.—But answer this :
Does he not court the rabble, dealing out,
With lavish art, his flattery and gold?
Call them his friends, the worthy men of Florence,
Whom he is proud to serve? Oh, mark you that!
Think not that proud men stoop, unless it be
The higher yet to rise! Say, does he not,
With cunning industry, still seek to gain
External allies and internal friends?
See the accused before his proud tribunal!
Say, is he stern in justice? Those who die
He fears might have opposed him. Does he yield
To gentle mercy? He but pardons those,
Who will become his zealous partisans.
Think on Lamberti, with his murderous hands
Red with his victim's blood! Yet he was spared,
For thus his potent friends became Colonna's.

Bondelmont. Lamberti should have died, if ever blood
By blood should be repaid!

Bianca. Then, while we hope
The wintry storm of war has past away,
The opening spring of gentle peace returning,
Why thus the citadel of Florence held
By hireling soldiers, and a guard in arms,
At every gate, as in a town besieged?
Why now a thousand lances newly raised
In Lombardy, to re-inforce his band?
Why courier after courier despatched
To Milan's hateful court?

Bondelmont. Are these things certain?

Bianca. As I live! 'tis true.
Nay, he in subtle policy will wed
Visconti's daughter; and, when thus allied
To Milan's tyrant, soon will he become
The tyrant here!

Bondelmont. Colonna wed
Visconti's daughter! If that fear be true—

Bianca. Alas, unhappy Florence, is there none,
Of all thy sons, who can foresee thy doom,

Or dares to raise an arm to ward the blow?
 Thus fell Ferrara under Este's power;
 Thus sunk Verona's liberties beneath
 Fell Eccelino's arts; and thus will fall
 Unhappy Florence! Such has been the rise
 Of each usurping tyrant, who deforms,
 With ruthless arms, sweet Italy's fair face.
 Look round on Lombardy. Her mighty states,
 In freedom powerful!—Where are they now?
 What is Milan? Milan, whose civic bands
 An emperor defeated, and defied
 An empire's force?—A tyrant's fortress now.
 That glorious city, whose heroic sons,
 Embattled on Lignano's bloody plain,
 First quelled imperial Barbarossa's pride,
 And crushed his host of German chivalry,
 Is now a robber's den!—

What Florence is, Milan once was. Alas,
 What Milan is, too soon may Florence be!

Bondelmont. Too true your words; deep reason prompts
 your fears.

Bianca. But why speak I to thee?
 Be it thy nature that hath made thee so,
 The lessons of thy youth, or the strong power
 Of adverse circumstance, yet art thou base,
 And, like the rest of Florence, but a slave!

Bondelmont. Not so! you wrong me; I will nobly dare.
 But when or how? Alone, I lack the power.—

Bianca. Hast thou no friends? Hast thou no influence
 O'er Florence' noble youth? Are they so deaf
 To glory, liberty, and nature's voice,
 That they cannot be roused?

Bondelmont. Thou art inspired
 To rouse thy sleeping countrymen to arm,
 And seize the freedom that would 'scape their grasp!

Bianca. Bondelmont, art thou roused?

Bondelmont. I am, I am.
 The ardour of your spirit kindles mine;
 My deeds shall catch the fire of your words.

[*She is about to speak.*]

Nay, say no more. You spur a willing horse
 Who rather needs the rein. Now to my task. [*going.*
 Florence shall wake, shake off her lethargy,
 And hurl the tyrant forth!

Bianca. Ha! hurl him forth?
 Expel him? He must die!—and speedily.
 Start not. What is one life to Florence' freedom?
 There is no hope, if you afford him time
 With strong alliance to confirm his power,
 And form a slavish party here at home.

Bondelmont. True, he must die, or Florence is not safe.—
 When he is dead, what then?

Bianca, (offering her hand.) Thou art no slave.

Bondelmont, (kissing it.) A rich, a rich reward! With-
 out it, life

Were valueless, and with it, beyond price.

Bianca. We now must part, but soon to meet again.
 Lose not a moment. Sound each daring spirit
 In this great cause. Be cautious, yet be bold.

Bondelmont. Farewell, and doubt me not; but think of
 me

As one who would deserve you. [*Exit.*

Bianca. Go, fond, confiding youth! For thee I care not.
 Yet art thou noble, and I trust wilt prove
 The noble instrument of my revenge!—
 His simple life were nothing! My revenge,
 Like the devouring sea, shall swallow up
 Fame, pomp, and power! all that unto him
 May appertain, and leave behind no wreck
 To tell the gaping world—Colonna was! [*Exit.*

SCENE II.—*An Apartment in DECASTRO's House.*

DECASTRO, STROZZI, MONTANO, LANDINO, *just risen from a banquet.*

Decastro. I must, I fear, have played the churlish host,
 That you so soon desert me.

Strozzi. Think not so.
 The hour grows late; 'tis time we were at home.

Decastro. Why, what have you gallants to do with time ?
 Were you but ragged, needy artisans,
 Called forth to labour by the rising sun,
 Then might you prate of time. Your only care
 Is, with some novel pastime or discourse,
 How you may cheat the hours as they rise,
 Day after day, in dull monotony.

Oft have I known you waste the goodly morn [to *Strozzi*.
 Disputing with your tailor on the fashion
 Of some new gala suit ; and you as long [to *Landino*.
 Discuss the merits of your horse or hound.

Strozzi. We will become the wiser by your censure,
 And better learn to husband our hours.

Landino. And so, farewell.

Enter BONDELMONT.

Strozzi. S'ay, here Bondelmont comes.

Decastro. As welcome as unlooked for.

Bondelmont. Signiors, well met.

[*MONTANO salutes BONDELMONT very coldly.*

Strozzi. We are rejoiced to see you.

Decastro. They were about to leave me ; you, I trust,
 Will aid me to detain them. Come, Bondelmont ;
 Come, gentlemen ; though 'tis the midnight hour,
 Good wine and lively music shall excite
 The gayety that suits the morn of life.

Bondelmont. Nay, spare me now, I am not in the mood.

Decastro. Not in the mood ! and pray why are you not ?

Landino. The gay Bondelmont melancholy struck !

Strozzi. True, whence that sombre shade upon your
 brow !

Hast seen a ghost ? or else been crossed in love ?

Bondelmont. There is a time for gravity as mirth.
 I am not in the mood.—Nor have we cause
 For revelry in Florence.

Decastro. What have we else to do ?—
 Unbroken leisure hangs upon our hands.
 We are no artisans or hoarding traders,
 And nobler occupations are no more !
 We rust in peaceful sloth. No Florentine

Need bear the galling burden of rude arms;
 The great Colonna will our battles fight.
 Nor need deep policy perplex our brains;
 He has relieved us of the cares of state.
 Our very purses he would gladly bear,
 To ease us of their weight; and, of his love,
 Would kindly weed away the cares of life,
 And leave us but its pleasures.

Bondelmont.

Will you jest

E'en at your country's shame? your own dishonour?

Decastro. I jest—but more in bitterness of spirit,
 Than mirthfulness of mood.

Bondelmont.

Ha! say you so?

Then I will speak—but may be overheard.

[*Looking round.*]

Are there no listening ears to catch my words?

Decastro. None near, but these around you.

Bondelmont. You are my friend [*to DECASTRO.*] and you
 [*to STROZZI.*]—And you, Landino.

The other is an honourable man,

Nor will I fear to trust him.

Montano. You do me only justice. Speak, and boldly.

Bondelmont. You tax me with my gloom. True, I was
 once

Loud in my mirth and joyous at the board—

Loved music, revelry—I then was free!

All. Free!

Bondelmont. I am become a gloomy, sluggish thing,
 Dark, dull, and joyless, as you behold.

What is the cause?—I feel myself a slave!

All. A slave!

Bondelmont. Colonna's slave!—and you, my fellow bond-
 men.

But I, unlike to you, lack yet the art,

To gild my chains, and call them ornaments.

Decastro. Are we Colonna's slaves?

Bondelmont.

What are ye else?

At whose command are closed the city-gates,

That none may issue forth, or enter in?

At whose command does blood of Florentines

Bedrench the ground before the dread tribunal?
 Who leads the youth of Florence to the wars?
 Who, from the coffers of our moneyed men,
 Drains out their glittering dross, (to them more dear
 Than their heart's blood) to pay his foreign ruffians?
 A foreign soldier rules with iron sway
 Within the walls of Florence! with our gold
 Buying the steel that rivets fast our chains!
 What other badge of bondage would you have?
 What are the men of Florence then but slaves?

Decastro. Alas, what are they else?

Bondelmont.

And what are we

But slaves more base than the rude commons are?
 The nobler once—the more degraded now!

Decastro. True, we have fallen from a loftier height
 To equal degradation.

Bondelmont. Decastro, I have seen thee, in the field,
 Demean thyself as that good soldier should,
 Who rates his life but at the price of honour.
 Where is that spirit fled?

Decastro. 'Tis yet within me.

Thou art the first, that boldly dares to speak,
 But not the first, who, in his secret soul,
 Has called Colonna tyrant, them but slaves,
 Who bow before his power.

Bondelmont. Can we thus speak, and yet forbear to act?

Decastro. Bondelmont, thou hast been a man of peace.
 Save of thy country's foes, no blood has dimmed
 The brightness of thy sword. Thou hast shunned feuds;
 Nor used thy friends, thy vassals, or thy wealth
 In private outrage, or uncivil strife.
 When such a man, his country's wrongs avenging,
 Shall shout "to arms!" against a tyrant foe,
 What heart can 'scape the patriotic fire?
 Who dare to preach of peace and slavish laws?

Bondelmont. What say you, friends?

Landino. Fear not, we will be with you.

Strozzi. Doubt not, Bondelmont, we will boldly follow,
 Where thou shalt boldly lead.

Bondelmont. To you, Montano, I will now address me.
Fierce, blood-stained feuds of old oppose our names,
I fear, yet unforgotten. Let us turn
Our ancient quarrel to a noble strife
Who best shall serve his country.

Montano.

Say no more.

The man, who strikes a gallant stroke for Florence,
Although my brother's blood had stained his hands,
Is evermore my friend!

Decastro.

'Tis nobly said—

Why should we longer pause than to secure
Sufficient numbers to command success?

Montano. We must have numerous aid.

Bondelmont.

Beware of numbers;

For numbers in conspiracy is weakness.

In secret enterprise, the fewer minds,

The fewer hours burdened with the trust,

The safer is the issue. Briefly then

Let each one sound some potent, trusty friend;

And, if he promptly show the latent fire,

That warms the patriot's heart, with him attend,

To-morrow, at this hour at my house;

There to mature our plot—Do you approve?

Decastro. We do.

Montano. And will not fail you.

Bondelmont.

Oh! beware.

Of misplaced confidence; for we must be

Discreet in counsel as in action bold,

Would we deserve to prosper.

All.

Doubt us not.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*An Apartment in the Palace.*

Enter COLONNA.

Colonna. This irksome pause undoes me; I would have
Excitement, action, to bestir my blood,
And swell my soul with high, adventurous thoughts.
Spite of myself, too oft I backward look,
And lose, oh direst loss! my self-esteem,
In recollection of the damning blot,

Which rests upon mine honour—
 Would I had never known her—
 Or, knowing, held my faith. Bianca's wrongs
 Hang heavy on my conscience, like the weight
 Chained to the felon's limbs! My soul would soar
 To noble thoughts, and dwell midst lottier themes;
 But the fell burden drags it down again
 To grovel on the earth—A change comes o'er
 My late undaunted soul: I am unmanned
 By superstitious fears—or feel oppressed
 By strong presentiments of coming ill—

Enter BERNARDO.

How now!—Bernardo! Art so soon returned?
 Where are my levies?

Bernardo. On the road to Florence.

Colonna. What says Visconti?

Bernardo. He redcems his pledge
 To aid your levies, and provide the means
 To keep your power on foot. A princely treasure,
 Escorted by a brave and numerous band,
 Now waits your orders.

Colonna. Good steel, and gold to make its strength mine
 own!

Your words are sweetest music to mine ear—
 Where are they, and what force?

Bernardo. Eight hundred lances.

A single day may bring them to the gates—

[*Colonna in deep thought.*—What are your plans, my lord?

Colonna. I will not pause—No, not an hour! Mark me:
 I will lead forth, (to guard against commotion,)
 A chosen body of the youth of Florence;
 Lay waste the lands of Pisa, and assault
 Her weaker posts—With half my present power,
 Stay you in Florence, keep the citadel,
 Admit within its walls the coming aid—
 Lest, her best warriors absent from their homes,
 Some evil might befall the goodly state
 Intrusted to our care—You understand me?

Bernardo. I do, my lord, and much approve your caution.

Colonna. Then haste to aid me. We have little time

For fitting preparation. Trace you out,
 Beneath the Northern wall, sufficient ground
 For full three thousand men. I dare not risk
 Their fearful muster in the heart of Florence! [*Exeunt.*]

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*An Apartment in Bondelmont's Palace.*

BONDELMONT, LANDINO, STROZZI, STENO, SORINI, and others,
conversing. Enter DECASTRO and MONTANO. BONDEL-
MONT, after taking them by the hand, turns to the others.

Bondelmont. All now are here; nor would I wish to
 meet

A nobler band, their fortune to partake.

Strozzi. True friends to Florence, and the deadliest foes
 E'er crossed a fell, usurping tyrant's path.

Bondelmont. Let us not boast of actions unachieved,
 Nor waste our precious hours in abuse.
 Weak words, against the mercenary lance,
 Were an unequal strife. Colonna's deeds
 By deeds must be opposed, and brief the time
 Ere we in arms must meet.

Decastro. Speak then, Bondelmont.
 We tread a rugged and a dangerous path;
 Thou art the guide, to whom we look for conduct.

Montano. Talk not of danger. Danger is the road
 That leads to honour.

Decastro. Think not that I fear.
 Name but the hour, and appoint my post,
 That hour shall find me there.

Bondelmont. We doubt it not—
 You freely have appointed me your leader;
 As freely will I enter on mine office.
 Since last we met to plot the good of Florence,
 Her direst foe, conspiring in her cause,

Has called to arms three thousand of her sons,
To serve his mad ambition; aiding thus
To arm the hand, which soon may strike him down.
Our kinsmen, friends, and followers are arrayed;
And we were worse than cowards not to seize
The lucky chance, which favouring fortune gives,
Nay, which our foe in madness thrusts upon us.
Colonna's present power is divided;
Part keep the citadel, part are encamped
With our own friends, beneath the Northern wall.
To-morrow's sun will see him take the field.
You in the camp— [To Montano and others.
will cautiously unfold

Our great design to every trusty chief,
And, as the hour approaches, noise abroad
Among the lighter sort and common file,
Those busy whispers, fearful mutterings,
That rouse men's minds and set their fears on edge.
And when my banner o'er the Northern gate
Unfurls its ample volume to the breeze,
Then rush to arms and boldly strike for Florence.
Myself will watch the tyrant.—

When from the citadel he shall depart,
I, with a chosen band, will seize the gate,
Which leads unto the camp, admit our friends,
While I shut out the tyrant's myrmidons.
You Strozzi, and Landino, in his rear
Will barricade the streets, and cut him off
From chance of succour from the citadel.
When the first shout for Florence strikes your ear,
Do you, Sôrini, on the 'larum bell,
Sound the loud summons to each noble heart
To arm in freedom's cause—
The rest of you, with your assembled power,
Will hasten to the central scene of strife,
Surround the tyrant and his ruffian guard,
And crush the foes of Florence.

Decastro. A well imagined plot, a glorious cause,
Strong friends and true; I hear Colonna's knell.

Steno. I fear all may not glide thus smoothly on.

These potent friends have now their power encamped
Without the wall, and may not bring their aid
Until it be too late.

Sorini. This sudden expedition mars our plot.

Bondelmont. Oh, say not so; 'tis better as it is.
His near approaching power, newly raised
In Lombardy, must spur us on to act
Without delay, if we would hope to prosper.

Steno. One half his power holds the citadel.
That stubborn post we must not hope to win.
What though he fall? his followers remain
Within the heart of Florence!

Bondelmont. Fear them not.
The venom'd serpent, shorter by the head,
Becomes a stingless trunk; their leader slain,
Dread not the wrath of the unguided band.
Colonna's band, not by Colonna led,
Is as a broken sword, a headless spear—
What, doubt you still?

Steno. 'Tis too adventurous.
Some one of wayward fortune's freaks will cross
Our airy hopes and plunge us into ruin.

Sorini. I own your doubts are mine.

Decastro. They are not mine.

Several. Nor mine.

Bondelmont. Mark you not that?
There spoke the voices of the dauntless brave.
'Tis but your fearful doubts that cross our hopes.
Your armour burnished, nay, your power arrayed,
Your followers waiting but the battle word,
Yet turn aside and shun the glorious strife?
Are you so backward in your country's cause?

Steno. I am not backward in my country's cause.
Show me a smiling prospect of success;
Though it be distant, and my life is hers;
But this wild scheme is little less than madness.

Bondelmont. If it be so—you now too late perceive it.
The danger is incurred—you have conspired!
Hope not to pause at this eleventh hour,
And 'scape the vengeance of a tyrant's fears!

'The self-betrayed deserve the traitor's fate,
 And now to pause, were to await destruction !
 Endue my tongue with strong persuasion, heaven,
 That I may rouse these sluggish souls, so deaf
 To honour's voice—so wakeful to base fear !
 (*Enter BIANCA, through a door in the middle of the scene.*)

Montano. A woman here !

Several. We are betrayed !

Bianca. (*Raising her veil and advancing.*)

Fear not !

A woman's form, no feeble woman's heart,
 Is present here, a witness to your counsels.
 Think you, because your arms alone can strike
 For Florence' rights ! your hearts alone can burn
 Indignant at her wrongs !
 Not so ! her daughters owe her love as deep,
 And, in her cause, as promptly will display
 The strength to suffer, and the soul to dare,
 As her heroic sons ! Why stand I here,
 If not to share your dangers, and revive
 The noble fire smouldering in your hearts ?
 On, noble sons of Florence ; if ye love
 The breath of honour, and the rich renown,
 That gilds the patriot's name, oh draw not back
 Your hands devoted to the glorious work,
 Until it be achieved ! Say, are ye noble
 In birth and honours ? be in nature noble,
 And scorn the yoke of slaves !—
 The dames of Florence loathe their coward lords ;
 The maids of Florence spurn their slavish suitors,
 Who stoop without a struggle to receive
 A hireling sworder's yoke ! A woman's voice
 Calls on the sons of Florence to awake,
 While yet they grasp their weapons in their hands,
 And strike their new forged fetters from their limbs,
 Nor rest a tyrant's slaves !—What can ye fear ?
 Have you not arms, and skill to wield those arms ?
 Are you not strong in numbers ? in your cause,
 Your country's cause, most strong ? What wait ye for ?
 Why are ye noble, save to lead the herd

Of common men through honour's rugged path?—
 Or will ye wait till ye are goaded on
 By all the woes a conquered people prove?
 Oppressed, disarmed, no weapon but despair—
 Will ye then hope to prosper?
 Were I a man!—I am a feeble girl—
 But ye are men!—

Several. We are! and will be freemen!

Bianca. Then why delay to act the parts of freemen?—
 Dread not Colonna's power. He has now
 No friend in Florence save the ruffian band,
 Who lackey his proud heels, by deeds of blood
 A base subsistence earning!—
 The nobles hate him for his haughty rule;
 The merchants, for his forced, oppressive loans;
 The populace, grown cold, now cease to shout
 Colonna's name; united Florence mourns
 The madness of that hour which betrayed
 Her liberties to him.—
 Do you but raise the battle cry of Florence;
 Ten thousand voices, in echo loud,
 Will thunder back your shout!
 Display her banner, and ten thousand hearts
 Will, rushing, throng beneath its ample folds,
 To conquer or to perish in her cause!
 Raise but your arms, ten thousand arms upreared
 Will lend a giant's vigour to your strokes,
 And make your conquest sure!
 Our very women, from the hostile roofs,
 Will shower each weighty missile on their heads,
 And crush our grinding tyrants to the earth!

Bondelmont. No more of doubt! and hence, unmanly
 fear!
 Who now will falter?

All. None. We are resolved.

Montano. And swear, united as one heart and hand,
 To stand or fall with honour.

All. One and all.

Bondelmont. No more of words, but let our actions
 speak!

Each to his post, and let to-morrow's sun
See darted back his horizontal rays

[*Exit Bianca unobserved.*]

In rival splendour from our burnished arms,
Whilst 'gainst the tyrant we ourselves array
In a devoted band!

Decastro. Away. Away! [*going.*]
Let Florence flourish, and the tyrant fall!

All. Let Florence flourish! [*Exeunt all but Bondelmont.*]

Bondelmont. Noble, matchless maid!
Already gone—and not one word to me!—
But she is right.—This hour belongs to Florence!
[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—*Bianca's Apartment.*

Enter SAVOLA, ANTONIO, and THERESA.

Savola. Bianca!—Where—where are you?

Theresa. My lord you need not call; she is not here.
I told you but the truth.

Savola. Impossible! Your tale cannot be true.
What, my Bianca! modest, wise and pure,
The slave of fiercest passions! She become
A demon of revenge!—

You sure are mad—or else some hellish plot
Contrive against your mistress. Woman, speak!
Speak truth or I will throttle you while yet
The lie is in your throat!

Theresa. For heaven's sake!
Protect me from him. Do not murder me!

Antonio. Brother, forbear! Your anger will not aid
To find Bianca. Waste not time in wrath.
Speak thou foolish, faithless girl, where is she?

Theresa. If ever, on my knees, unto the priest,
Beneath the holy roof, before the image
Of my good patron saint, I have confessed
My hidden sins of action, thought and word,—
Such truth I utter now: She loved Colonna.
The only limit to her love was honour.

Oft have they met, and, but that foul ambition
Has made him false to love, she would have been
By this his honoured bride. But she of late
Was scorned, deserted, and, for vengeance wild,
In dark, mysterious plot now seeks his ruin.

Antonio. How know you that?

Theresa. Have I not told you that with young Bondel-
mont

She has held secret meetings?—Not of love.
Long was the conference, and loud her tone,
And after, the dark eye and scowling brow,
The firm clenched hands and lips compressed in hate,
Spoke not of love, but fierce and warring passions.
All day, the live long day, o'er blackest thoughts
She brooding sat, to outward objects dead;
No sign of life, but fierce, convulsive starts,
Which spoke the pangs within.

Then, in the stillest hour of the night,
When natural rest her senses should have calmed,
Oft would she start from sleep, and fierce exclaim:
“Colonna! never shalt thou wed another!”

Then, as one,

The eager witness of a bloody fight,
Some fearful strife, where man to man opposed,
In deadliest hate, deals mutual wounds and death,
She loud would cry:

“Press on! the tyrant bleeds! deem not his mail
Impassive to your steel!—His minions faint
And shrink beneath your strokes! Think nothing done
While he or his survive!”

Then, sudden with clasped hands and starting eye
And anguish writhed limbs, would wildly shriek,
In the shrill, piercing accents of despair,

“They yield! they yield! O coward sons of Florence!”

Savola. Oh fearful change! Bianca thus convulsed
By direst passions?

Antonio. Deep have been the wrongs
Which thus can rouse her noble mind to vengeance.

Theresa. And may she prosper in her just revenge!
But oh! where are you now, much injured lady?

Antonio. Ha! true, where is she now? Come brother, haste.

Arouse yourself, she must be sought and found.

Savola. Perhaps she is no longer worth the seeking.

Antonio. What mean you now?

Savola. This may be truth, and yet not all the truth.

If, righteous heaven, thy chastising hand

Must deal the blow, oh, let it fatal prove

To life and honour both!

Antonio. Nay, give not way

To nerveless sorrow thus.

Savola. Why should I not?

My virgin silver now is turned to dross.

Oh fairest, purest, best, how art thou lost!

How suddenly from height of excellence,

Sunk down to sin and shame!

Antonio. Hence with that thought, and better know my niece.

Some daring error, no degrading blot,

Will ever stain her fame. Speed hence and seek her!

Savola. Lead where you please, for I am nothing now,
And lack both will and power to oppose you. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—*A Street in Florence.*

Enter BONDELMONT and DECASTRO, in armour.

Bondelmont. It is a glorious morn; bright shines the sun,

As nothing loath to smile upon our deeds;

Yet look thy last upon his face, Colonna,

For soon the storm will burst.—At this still hour,

E'en while our foe arrays his alien bands,

And issues forth in all the pomp of war,

To add imagined conquests to his sway,

Within the massy palaces of Florence,

Her trueborn sons, with stealthy pace assembled,

Are arming for the strife. Dream on, vain man,

Insulted Florence will her aid afford

To swell a tyrant's rule! Soon shall her voice

In startling thunder burst upon thine ear,

And speak a fearful truth!—

The hour has come; our friends are at their posts,
Grasp hard their weapons, and, with anxious ears,

The promised signal wait. Their idle swords,
Too long confined within the envious sheath,
Now thirst for freedom and the tyrant's blood!

Decastro. Why stays our messenger!—I fear—

Bondelmont. Fear not!

There is a startling voice at mine ear,
That shouts in tones of triumph to my heart,
That we shall wade through the oppressor's blood
Unto a glorious issue! Look—our scout.

Enter a follower of BONDELMONT.

Follower. Speed to your power, my lord; Colonna
comes.

His escort now advances to the gate.

Bondelmont. Then to our post; surprise the feeble guard,
And raise the shout of "Florence!"

[They draw and exeunt.]

Enter BIANCA, muffled.

Bianca. He comes! the proud, insulting tyrant comes!
His foes await, and my revenge draws on!
The streets of Florence are our battle field;
In this arena we the lion bait,
Whose roar has frightened Florence!

[A flourish of trumpets. She starts.]

—Never more

Shall your proud summons call him to the field!
Tremble, thou tyrant, thy dark hour is nigh.
Sound then thy trumpets; we will ring our bells!

[She retires to the back ground.]

Enter COLONNA and BERNARDO, in armour.

Colonna. I take you thus aside, again to warn you.
I leave you my lieutenant here in Florence,
And lead away the boldest of her youth,
To vent that ardour in more distant fields,
Which else, confined at home, might breed commotion.
Think not each factious spirit is enrolled
In yonder camp. Sedition swarms in Florence.
Trust not these moody burghers. Let not sleep
Relieve your anxious watch, till you admit,
Within the circuit of yon trusty wall,
The coming aid, whose numbers make you safe.

Bernardo. Fear not, my lord; these surly citizens
Shall never catch me napping.

Colonna. Then, farewell.

Here we will part—for I must now to horse.

[*Distant shouts of "Florence," "Bondelmont," &c.*
What means that shout?

Bernardo. Perchance some sudden quarrel—
Some private feud blazed forth. [*Shouts.*

Colonna. Not so, by heaven!
The shout is "Florence!" and the burghers rise

In arms against our rule. Oh luckless hour! [*Shouts.*

Bernardo. Again! again! It swells upon the ear
In louder, fiercer tones. [*Alarm bells rung.*

Colonna. And answering bells,
With rebel tongues, the mutinous clamours spread!
Draw then, and to the gate; we must exclude
The fearful force without, or all is lost.

[*They draw and exeunt. Bianca advances.*

Bianca. Colonna! never shalt thou wed another!
The scorned Bianca, with resistless spell,
Has raised a howling tempest, that shall sweep
Thy towering hopes to ruin.— [*Listens anxiously.*
Now unrelenting war usurps the place
Of hollow peace—and broken armour, wounds,
The bosom rending groan, the glazing eye,
The arm unnerved in death, shall soon confess
The fearful empire of wide wasting war!

[*Shouts of "Florence!" "Colonna!" &c. Bells.*

Fierce grow the shouts. The struggle has begun.

They bleed—they fall—that I may-be avenged!—

I am a woman, and the sight of blood

My woman's soul appals!— [*Hides her face.*

But 'tis too late. Avaunt, slow-paced remorse!

Thou canst but punish, not prevent the crime!

He is a tyrant! They for freedom strike,

While they my wrongs avenge! On, sons of Florence!

Ye cannot fail; ye are too strong, too true!

He cannot conquer, and he dare not live

To taste the conquered's shame!— [*Shouts, &c.*

This way the war's tumultuous current bends;

This way Colonna comes. [*She retires.*

*Enter parties fighting, and retreating across the back
ground.*

Enter COLONNA.

Colonna. I faint from loss of blood. My followers fly. Alone, on foot, "and compassed round with foes"—
There is no hope!—Yet will I shout "*Colonna!*"

Enter three citizens, who attack him.

Come on, ye slaves, and face once more *Colonna!*—

[*Beats them back.*] Hence, mutinous dogs!—

They rally now. My banner waves on high!—

They close in mortal strife. Oh, could I join them!

[*He attempts to go off. Bianca steps proudly across his path, and raises her veil. He stares wildly at her, then turns away and hides his face, and is struck down by a citizen.*

Enter one of the Conspirators.

Conspirator. On, on! They yield! For Florence! Strike for Florence!

[*Exeunt Conspirator and Citizens, shouting "Florence!"*

Bianca. Bianca's soul! no base, plebeian arm
Has struck thee down! Thy pomp, thy pride, thy power,
Where are they now? Thy boasted lances fly,
And thou art—dust?—already senseless clay?—
So soon! One moment since, the warrior's soul
Beamed from that eye, and heaved that haughty heart,
And now—'tis awful—e'en to me 'tis awful!—

[*Turns away. A pause.*

And art thou dead? and with the sordid dust
Doth thy best heart's blood mingle?—What a wreck
Of nobleness, perverted unto baseness!—
Thou then art gone—and what is life to me?
I am avenged! and care not to survive you.
Already have I proved the fierce extremes
Of love and hate, and care to know no more!—
Shall fierce excitement sink to dull despair?
To live—to creep through stagnant years of life,
And sink with slow decay? Come thou blest potion.

[*Producing a phial.*

Within thy narrow compass is embraced
A score of deaths, bought with a single pang.
Pour forth thy furies on one little life,
And I will thank thee! [*Drinks—throws away the phial.*

'Tis done! My doom is sealed. There now is no relent-
ing—

Death—

That many-pathed and gloomy wilderness,
So oft explored, and yet to us unknown,
Will soon be known to me! [*Covers her face. A pause.*
Thou harsh, but speedy friend, I feel thy power;
Already towards my heart thou workest thy way,
To sap life's citadel. O God! O God! [*Sinks on one knee.*

Enter THERESA, ANTONIO, and SAVOLA.

Theresa. Look, my lord; she is found.

Antonio. Is this Bianca?

Savola. Daughter, what do you here?—
Here, on this fatal spot, at this dread hour?
Art thou distracted?

Bianca. (*rising slowly.*) No! "I am not mad—
O would to heaven I were."—This is my court!
Here I give willing audience to death,
Who seeks in solemn embassy to win me;
Yon silent tongue resistless pleads his cause,
And we have shaken hands.

Savola. Speak not of death.

Bianca. I must, for he is near.

Savola. Too near, alas. O quit this horrid scene!

Bianca. Nearer, my father, than you yet believe him:
Along my veins the subtle poison glides,
And faithfully performs his silent work.

All. Poisoned!

Bianca. I am. The work is almost done.
The bitterness of death has passed away. [*Sinks down.*

Savola. Can this be heaven's decree? Oh, vanish thus
Your father's hopes?—the promise of your youth?

Bianca. Alas, too true! Oh, how unlike my hopes!
My life moved onward like a gentle stream,
Which meets at length a cavernous abyss;
And then one moment's madly wild career,
Which now—in darkness closes. [*Dies.*

Savola. She is gone!

Alas! forever gone! [*Throws himself on the body.*

Antonio. Oh, sudden, fearful stroke! A thunder bolt,
Across a sky serene, were less unlooked for!

It startles faith, defies the proof of sense
To doubt or to believe it.

Enter BONDELMONT, his armour battered and bloody.

Bondelmont. Is this but falsehood, or a horrid truth?
[*Seeing her body.*] Bianca here!

Savola. (looking wildly up.) Who calls Bianca?

Bondelmont. 'Tis Bondelmont calls—
The wronged Bondelmont, wretched and deceived.

Savola. Unhappy youth—But why should I bemoan
One happier than myself? To you remain
The victor's glory, and the patriot's fame—
To me—[*embraces the body*—My all! my all!

Bondelmont. Victor and patriot?—Forever cursed,
With blasting disappointment like to mine,
Be all who dare, with base and selfish ends,
Their country's cause profane!

[*Covers his face with his hands.*

Antonio. Ye who your sex's gentle worth would change
For passion's lawless rule—behold its victim!
And ye who trifle with a woman's love,
With ruthless hearts the bond of faith disowning,
Mark well this scene, and dread a woman's vengeance!

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ERRATA.

Page 11, line 4, for "lady, not back,"
read "lady, *start* not back,"

Page 13, line 11 from bottom, for "they" read "*their.*"



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